**SERMON FOR TRINITY 10 | 08.08.21**

**1 Kings 19: 4-8; Ephesians 4: 25 – 5: 2; St John 6: 35, 41-51**

**You can hardly miss Richard Osman on television these days. 6’7” tall and with an enviable ability to be both funny and hugely knowledgeable, shows like *Pointless, 8 out of 10 cats* and *Have I got News for you* have all sought him out to work alongside current comedians like Alexander Armstrong, Matt Lucas and David Walliams. What most of us hadn’t expected is that he can also write good fiction too.**

**So wanting something to read on the train up to Leeds last weekend I picked up the No1 book in WH Smiths which happened to be Richard’s detective novel, *The Thursday Murder Club* which is accurately described by Marian Keyes as *compassionate, warm, moving and very funny.* Despite its very colloquial style and page-turning qualities, it is also very perceptive.**

**Joyce, one member of the Thursday Murder Club, describes in her diary, how she took a nasty tumble in the street *…and I dropped my bag and my things went everywhere – keys, glasses case, pills, phone. And every single person who saw me fall came to help. Every single one of them. A cyclist helped me to my feet, a traffic warden picked up my things and a lady with a pushchair sat with me until I got my breath back. Perhaps they only came to help because I look frail and helpless? But I don’t think so. I think I would have helped a fit young person if they took a tumble and I think you would too. That’s what we are as human beings. For the most part we are kind…***

**Which made me think – in the context of today’s Bible readings: what is it that drives us, what is it that motivates us?**

**Watch any number of Ted talks and you get a series of answers – which all turn out to be variations on the same theme. Ted talks are motivational seminars, rarely more than ten minutes long, delivered with passion. They tell us that to be successful we need to understand the things that hold us back and put all our energies into qualities that make the best use of our gifts and abilities. Into the dustbin go guilt, regrets and any kind of wooly-mindedness about what steps to take next. There too go any kinds of dependence – on alcohol of course but also on the need for approval from others, on distractions and any kind of time-wasting. Ted talks tell us that we have all the resources within ourselves to meet any challenge. All we need is the determination not to let other people or other issues get in the way.**

**Ted talks are delivered by strong, smiling, confident people who have – like those adds for weight loss personal trainers on the Tube – set themselves targets – and achieved them.**

**Now don’t get me wrong: there are times when we do need to dig deep and work and work until we achieve the right outcome. Many of our jobs and many of our pass-times require perseverance and tenacity: you don’t achieve Olympic medals with wishful thinking.**

**But these readings this August from St John’s Gospel which invite us to focus on the Bread of Life start from a very different place to the average Ted Talk.**

**It was the great spiritual writer of the last century, Evelyn Underhill, who wrote in one of her letters: *The question I need to wrestle with is not ‘What attracts me, or even what would help me?’ but ‘where can I serve God best’? And usually the answer to that is, where He has put me.***

**Poor Elijah, in our first reading, has been running away from King Ahab and his appalling wife Jezebel for months. She had vowed to kill him as soon as look at him, and he is rightly terrified. He is totally alone as all his supporters have been taken from him. And as he sits under his solitary broom tree he shows just how desperate he is: *It is enough; now O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors…***

**Would a well-pitched Ted talk be appropriate here? Perhaps he needs new skills and a bit more motivation?**

**Or perhaps the angel was right: he wakes Elijah out of his torpor and offers him fresh cake, cooked on hot stones – in the middle of the desert. Practically and metaphorically, here in the wilderness, God reached out and gave Elijah what he needed: a sense of being valued for who he was and the confidence that he was not alone. And how was that done? In a cake, baked on hot stones!**

**And Elijah’s motivation was revived: as it says, *then he went on in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights…* in Bible language, for a very long time.**

**So what drives us? What get us up the morning and spurs us on? Ted talks will list all the usual drivers: ambition, pride, the desire to achieve, satisfaction in what we have accomplished, the wish to help others; or some of the more negative ones: guilt, responsibility, a fear of failure, competition, trying to prove we are better than some people have said we are – or even just a sense that we must, we ought: the everlasting treadmill.**

**And into those very solitary lists come the words of Jesus, *I am the bread of life..***

**Which can take us back to Elijah, famished when on the run. Or it can take us to see ‘bread’ as just another word for love.**

**Remember Evelyn Underhill again: *The question I need to wrestle with is not ‘What attracts me, or even what would help me?’ but ‘where can I serve God best’? And usually the answer to that is, where He has put me.***

**God’s instinct, always, is to help us to be whole – or if you like, to be holy. And the way to holiness, he says in his famous parable, comes like this: *when I was hungry, you fed me, when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink, when I was in prison you visited me…***

**In the place where I was, you came and rescued me.**

**It wasn’t a set up: it wasn’t what you were expecting at that moment but when the moment came, you were there.**

**St Paul’s sermon in the 2nd reading is all about being in the right frame of mind so that we are ready for the moment when we are needed. We put away lies and anger and thieving and malice and selfishness - why? Not just because they make us horrible to live with (though they do) but because they are a distraction from our first calling: to put others before ourselves. In his dire situation Elijah needed to be fed – and he was. So in every Holy Communion we stretch out our hands for what we need most: God’s gift to take us beyond ourselves and to be ready – and able - to love.**

**Here. Now. But often when we are least expecting it.**

**How often we wish we were somewhere else; in a different situation! But Richard Osman’s apparently ‘O so simple’ little vignette from Joyce’s diary in a throwaway murder mystery takes us to the heart of Evelyn Underhill’s insight: God has called me not to some other place, some grander environment, a more influential role or a place where I can make more money or more friends. He has called me to strive to be whole/holy, right here. The lady tripped – and everyone came to her help. As Joyce says, *for the most part we are kind.***

**Many of you will know Ed Sheeran’s song which has the words: *Take me into your loving arms, kiss me under the light of a thousand stars, place your head on my beating heart (I'm thinking out loud) that maybe we found love right where we are.* The much older song you may have sung at Sunday School (and since) and it goes like this: *Thank you Lord for this new day* and *Thank you Lord for clothes to wear* and *Thank you Lord for food to eat – right where we are*. God gives us Bread from heaven; he gives us his love to share: just where we are.**