

Sunday Thought

25th October 2020 30 in Ordinary Time

Readings

Deuteronomy 34: 1- 12

Psalm 90: 1 – 6, 13 - 17

1 Thessalonians 2: 1 - 8

Matthew 22: 34 – 46



That Unspoken Word

The word is close to the beginning of every news bulletin at the moment although in our families and in society generally it is usually mentioned far less and often quietly. It's disguised by other words and phrases - '*left us*', '*last rest*', '*passed away*', '*the final exit*', and even '*snuffed it*.' The word, of course is '*death*'. For the past six months it has been different. Many elderly people have been living in isolation, fearful of the presence of a minute virus which has made the word more prominent in all our minds. Others have kept to the traditional approach of '*out of mind until a knock comes at my door*'. Early in my ministry I was surprised to discover how many people under forty had never had some close encounter with death and dying. On the other hand our ministry in West Africa made us aware of how, for most of the world, death is part of life. It's like that of course in the scriptures ...

Writing to Christians at Thessalonica this week, the apostle Paul reminds them of how much he suffered from opposition to him and his message when he first came among them and how his response had been that of gentle love born out of a longing to share Jesus with them. "*I'm ready to die for the Gospel because of my love for those who need to hear it.*"

I am reminded of the countless sacrifices which have been made in recent months both locally and world-wide as medical staff and close families in homes and hospitals have lovingly put their lives on the line in the service of coronavirus patients.

Paul's acceptance of life and death was of course based on his knowledge of the living Jesus and on his absolute faith in him and his words The promise of

"today in paradise" was real for him and for all who believed, just as much as it was for a convicted criminal at Golgotha. He had the assurance that "to live is Christ and to die is gain – more of him and all those who belong to him."

The reading from Matthew today tells of yet another attempt by the theologians to catch Jesus out in his teaching. They had asked him which of God's laws was most important. In reply Jesus reminds his critics of the heart of all our living with and for God. *"There is one God."* He said. *"And there is one Law - to love him, all his people and creation.* To return to my theme. We are with Moses again in our reading from Deuteronomy long after he had received those eternal laws from God. This time it is the final story - a beautiful description of his dying to live.

The people of God had reached the end of their long journey. Moses had fulfilled the vocation he received on meeting God at an inextinguishable burning bush in the desert. Now he was at the end of forty years of continually moving on through numerous trials and triumphs. In sight of the promised land, God took him up Mount Pisgah in the Nebo range, to have a look at it. Roughly twenty-five crow-miles from Jericho, Jerusalem and Bethlehem he could see most of the land's mountains and fertile plains where the story of eternal salvation was to be enacted. There, God said to him, *"Moses. You're not going into this land. It's Joshua's call to lead the people across the Jordan. It's time for you to come home! Your world work is done!"* Moses had walked with God through forty arduous, challenging, faith-welding years and now he travels on with God through the mountains – walking into the fuller life-dimension which Jesus was to speak of as like a house of many rooms. Home!
Who's afraid to go home when the day's work is done?

A PRAYER (from today's psalm)

Lord, fill us each morning with your constant love,
and we shall be glad every day of our lives

Just another thought. Apart from an understanding comment on life and death, the psalmist gave me a new approach to gardening. An empathy with weeds – all those flowers I pull up because I think they are blooming in the wrong place. *"We are like weeds which sprout in the morning, grow and bloom, then dry up and die in the evening."* There's beauty and new life in their dying too.



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