

## Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - 2018

You have all heard of my lecturer in Biblical Studies who began the first lecture by telling us that the three most important things in our studies are context, context, and context. In the same vein I am suggesting to you this morning that the three things most important aspects of our faith are the Body of Christ, the Body of Christ and the Body of Christ!

Our confirmation candidates are reaching the sharp end of their preparation. We have looked at the story of the Passover and the Exodus, we have found Jesus and his mission reflected in this great story, we have looked the Bible and its narratives, and we have considered the Bible in the context of our prayer through the words, among others, of the Psalms. We have yet to consider the world of the sacramental life, that's next. What I am keen to do is to create a sense in them of wanting more to be hungry for matters of faith, confirmation is not graduation!

We are, it seems, born hungry. Hunger is universal human issue; 'cooking is the most ancient art' said one French gourmet, 'because Adam was born hungry!' So we worship and celebrate a God who understands hunger. The confirmees have been learning about a God who gathered a band of nobody slaves around a meal of lamb and unleavened bread on the bloody and violent night of Passover. Who freed them from bondage and led them on a wilderness journey, giving them bread from heaven to feed them on the way. This God forms the new community of Israel to be a place of hospitality, a people who will care for the stranger because "you too were aliens in the land of Egypt." God provides Israel with land, with the ability to grow food, and asks that the divine-human relationship be formed and re-formed, remembered and passed along, through harvest, the offering of the first fruits and the celebration of a meal through folk like the mysterious man from Baal-shalishah. When the people find their end of the bargain hard to keep, the prophets issue the stirring reminder to stop spending money on what does not satisfy and instead come to receive the good food of God, without cost. Jesus spoke to human hunger. "I am the bread of life." Words that follow on the heels of having fed five thousand followers with five loaves and two fishes at the Passover. And it is in this Passover context - of hunger and feeding, birth and re-birth, that we understand our identity as God's people, the church, the Body of Christ. We in turn then reinterpret the life, the witness, the death, rising, and reign of Jesus, the Christ. We do this, following him, through table fellowship, in the sacramental Body of Christ. We here at St Philip's stand in this great tradition of hospitality, this is part of our DNA and it begins in the hospitality of the Eucharist. As our candidates have been thinking about and preparing for their confirmation we have been considering our identity, an identity bestowed on them at Baptism and in coming weeks confirmed in them. We have thought about the Passover of Jesus, the

Body of Christ, the Passover we share as we are fed – the Body of Christ and our identity as the Body of Christ. Our Baptismal identity is freely bestowed on us, but as we become mature, confirmed Christians, as we come forward we have been considering our identity and the call it has on us. The mysterious man from Baal Shalishah seems to be making a sacrificial offering. The bread that he offers, although seemingly insignificant, has been baked from the first ripe grain which suggests that he was being obedient to the demand to offer God the first fruits of the harvest. It is the very best he has!

Now those of you who grew up in the church the 'olden days' may remember the words of the Communion service. 'And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves our souls and bodies to be a reasonable holy and lively sacrifice unto thee!' This giving of ourselves is represented by our presence, our repentance, our monetary offering, our prayer and praise of thanksgiving and by our bringing to the altar the gifts of bread and wine. These offerings are received, and after setting them in the context of Passover we receive them back. When we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim your death Lord, this is Passover.

At a school liturgy once the teacher in charge invited us all forward for bread and wine at communion time. Bread and wine! I would have been better off at Dan Murphys and Bakers Delight! What we receive back is so much more and that is exactly what is happening at the feeding of the 5000. After Jesus has fed the multitude they chase after him and he says to them, you are chasing me because you ate your fill of the loaves, and you probably want more... clearly you have no insight into what it means, what that bread symbolised. At that point we hear those words 'I am the bread of life.'

On this wild mountainside a small boy comes forward and offers the food he has. The disciples are very quick to dismiss the lad – as they often do with children; what is the use of this among so many? But Jesus recognises the sacrificial nature of the offering, it is all he has. Jesus takes it and conducts that familiar fourfold ritual – he takes, blesses, breaks and gives just as we do here at the altar.

We are that small boy, we are called to childlikeness; we have little, if anything, to offer, some might tell us our offering is worthless. But it isn't, not if it is the best we have and also that we recognise our hunger. If our offering is made in that spirit, then what we receive back is enough for us and it indeed spills over, twelve baskets...enough for you to go out into the byways and highways of O'Connor to feed those who are not here. Our Eucharistic hospitality is a crucial sign of who we are, our identity, we are people of Passover we have been fed and we are blessed. If our offering is the best, if it is costly, then we have shared in the sacrifice of Jesus, this is Passover, this is what our confirmation candidates are considering as

they prepare to come forward to make their communion as confirmed members of the Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ – Jesus, the Body of Christ – the Sacrament, the Body of Christ - the Church! We the Church are the sacramental Body of Christ, we become so by being fed by the sacrament of Christ's Body, the presence of Jesus in our midst. This nourishment, if I can paraphrase St Paul, enables us to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. St Augustine wrote: *When you hear "The body of Christ", you reply "Amen." Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your "Amen" may ring true! Amen.*