

Avoidance!

1 Kings 19⁴⁻⁸; Psalm 34¹⁻⁸; Ephesians 4²⁵⁻⁵²; John 6^{35,41-51}

*Therefore be imitators of God
[Eph 5¹]*

How far might you go to avoid making decisions?
How good are you at avoiding difficult conversations?

Avoidance is the link that I think joins all the readings for this morning.

Elijah famously wants to avoid dealing with success.

- ✦ His big moment, when he confidently and brashly challenges the Prophets of Baal to have their offering to their God consumed by fire and nothing happens yet his saturated offering is consumed together with the altar, has passed. He won and the drought ended in the land.
- ✦ How he could have pressed the message home and won a nation back to God. Instead he runs away - he runs 90 miles South and then asks to die!
- ✦ God deals with Elijah very gently and lets him sleep and wakes him to feed him - and though Elijah wants to let go of life and God, God doesn't let Elijah go.

This accords with what is said by Jesus in John's Gospel:

- ✦ He talks about those the Father draws to him - the key to the relationship with God: if God has you, you won't wriggle free!
- ✦ The emphasis in the text is on Jesus saying that he is the Bread of Life (it is so important that it is repeated three times over three weeks in the lectionary), but the crowd aren't too interested in what Jesus says (they have the concentration span of adolescent flees - they only want to see impressive things) and try to avoid the point.
 - ✦ In the verse before our reading starts the crowd have said - **give us this bread always**. But Jesus then tells them that **whoever comes to me will never be hungry**.
 - ✦ Jesus has drawn the comparison with the Hebrews who received bread from God every day and this offer which was a one-off. One commentators says here (Carson): *This does not mean there is no need for continued dependence upon him,*

for continual feeding upon him; it does mean that there is no longer that core emptiness that the initial encounter with Jesus has met.

- ✦ They also avoid the key statement - Jesus says that he is **I AM**, the name for God in the Covenant and the one given to Moses at the Exodus. This was deliberately provocative to the Jewish audience but makes explicit who Jesus thinks he is.
- ✦ They continue avoiding the point. They try to get round it by saying **Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?**

Faced with the claims of Jesus to be God and his claim that he is the only one who can deal with our 'core emptiness' many still try to avoid the issue. Will you believe or won't you?

Josh MacDowell famously says here: You have to make up your mind about Jesus. He either is who he claims to be or he is a lunatic on the same level as a man who says he is a fired egg!

When we get to Paul there are many more things that we, as Christians, try to avoid.

We agree with what he says in principle, but as Bismark observes, *When a man approves of something in principle it means he hasn't the slightest intention of putting it into practice!*

Paul is making the simple point that **in Christ** we are a community and that when we are **members together** we shouldn't let each other down.

- ✦ Instead of **falsehood** we choose **truth** because it is the best way to be together.
- ✦ We exchange the selfish **anger** that expresses itself in self-centred irritation and crossness and opt for the anger that leads to justice for each other and for the world.
- ✦ We choose not to nurture our hurts and **do not let the sun go down on our anger**
- ✦ We don't take but we give!

He then gives us a good test to help us avoid avoiding what God wants to be. As Christians the **Holy Spirit** lives in us - is God comfortable with what we are and what we think and with what we say?

Once we have chosen Christ we cannot then avoid the next step which is to **imitate God!**

Of course we want to avoid that - the model is self-sacrifice and that is costly!