

**Christianity isn't for everyone!**

Proverbs 9<sup>1-6</sup>; Psalm 34<sup>9-14</sup>; Ephesians 5<sup>15-20</sup>; John 6<sup>51-58</sup>

*No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me. [John 6<sup>44</sup>]*

It is something that we don't want to have to face, but Christianity isn't for everyone.

There are two things that we should never lose sight of:

- ✦ God calls us to faith - it is always his initiative and never ours. It is he that **will raise us up**, something that we could never do for ourselves. However you have arrived here this morning it is no accident: God has taken the initiative and that gives you a dignity that is a gift! If you don't accept that it is probably the case that Christianity isn't for you!
- ✦ When we respond to God it changes us - because we spend time with Jesus we simply cannot help but become better people: the best possible version of ourselves. If you think you can be a Christian and you don't think you need to change and you aren't willing to take up the challenge to be more like Jesus it is probably the case that Christianity isn't for you!

Our Gradual hymn this morning is certainly in my top 5 hymns. The verse,

**O make but trial of His love  
Experience will decide  
How blest are they, and only they  
Who in His truth confide**

sets out the simple truth that you can only know the benefits of faith from the inside.

There is too much in the readings today to explore it all, so I want to focus on just two things: it is clear that you can be a depressed Christian but that you can't be an angry Christian.

The passage from 1 Kings demonstrates clearly that the prophet Elijah is suffering from clinical depression.

- ✦ He has just challenged the prophets of Baal and won in dramatic style - the people responded, **the Lord indeed is God, the Lord indeed is God.**
- ✦ The drought that he had predicted and controlled came to an end - it began with a **cloud no bigger than a person's hand rising out of the sea** and then **the heavens grew black with clouds and wind [and] there was a heavy rain.**
- ✦ Despite all that the threat to his life from **Jezebel** took him to a point that brought on a depression.

- ✦ God's response is gentle. The pattern is that Elijah found a **solitary broom tree** and **asked to die**. **He lay down and fell asleep** and was woken by an angel who prepared food and so **he ate and drank**. **He lay down again** and then **he got up and ate and drank**.
- ✦ This practical response equipped him to make the 40 day journey to Horeb where he met God in a **sound of sheer silence**. God simply asks him, **what are you doing here, Elijah?** God then sends Elijah back with a number of tasks, one of which was to **anoint Elisha.... as prophet in your place**.

God knew Elijah and what he needed in his situation and so to those he calls the assurance is there that God does not hold the things that afflict us against us - rather he supports us through them and even provides a release.

God is less gentle in the things that we choose for ourselves that negatively affect us and others, and an example of this is **anger**.

- ✦ Paul's overall challenge is that we become **imitators of God**. He is clear that **bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander** and **malice** has no part in this.
- ✦ The antidote is to **speak the truth in love**, not to **let the sun go down on your anger**, to **work honestly**, to **share**, to say only things that are helpful.
- ✦ The most obvious antithesis of anger is **forgiveness**. Forgiveness is both Christlike and practical. Rowan Williams says (read it again on the web if you need to):

*The person who asks forgiveness has renounced the privilege of being right or safe; she has acknowledged that she is hungry for the bread of acceptance and restoration of relationship. But equally the person who forgives has renounced the safety of being locked into the position of offended victim; she has decided to take the risk of creating afresh a relationship known to be capable of involving hurt. A willingness to forgive is clearly the mark of a humanity touched by God - free from anxiety about identity and safety, free to reach out into what is other, as God does in Jesus Christ. But it may be that a willingness to be forgiven is no less the mark of a humanity touched by God. It is a matter of being prepared to acknowledge that I cannot grow or flourish without restored relationship, even when this means admitting the ways I have tried to avoid it, admitting sin. When I am forgiven by the one I have injured, I accept that both that I have damaged a relationship, and that change is possible.*

There can be no angry Christians - only forgiven ones and, because they are forgiven, they are then forgiving.

The **bread of life** isn't hard to swallow for the people who know God - it is a diet that nurtures us when we need it and in sharing it means we share in the life-giving and life-enhancing experience of God.