

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 21st July 2019
Trinity 5 YrC

Abraham and the hospitality of table

Our story from Genesis today has to be one of my favourites. In some ways its because this is a matter of fact telling of what might have been an everyday occurrence. Abraham spies some road weary travellers and invites them to rest, to take some shade and light refreshment. If you have ever travelled in the Middle East you would know this was not an unusual occurrence. Generosity and hospitality are key elements in Middle Eastern culture; some of which comes from a very practical root. Travelling in such hot countries can be dangerous, if only from the elements, so to offer water and shade which may not be plentiful is a basic human kindness.

Here is Abraham offering, at least on the face of it, basic human decency to travellers on a dusty road. Then these are not any ordinary travellers of course and Abraham acknowledges this in his reaction. He says he is offering a little bread and water – yet he puts before them some choice food, using the best ingredients he has.

Food and hospitality have been an important part of human interaction for as long as we've been around. Eating brings us together; to share a meal is perhaps one of the most intimate events we can publicly share in. Eating together evokes trust, value, respect, love; to be offered food is to be given generosity, food that could have fed my family I give to you, you become part of mine.

The table has been described as the most important piece of furniture in the house; some suggesting TV diners have been a major contributor to family break down and disengagement in the twenty first century.

As a Christian family we gather around our table to share in our family meal. The bread and wine of the eucharist is our hospitality to each other.

This isn't quite the same as a Sunday lunch at home, it is not meant to be. This spiritual meal connects us with each other and with God in a new, cosmic and intimate way. The eucharist now is a divine meal, reflecting that banqueting table spoken of by Isaiah in Chapter 25. 6-9, 'on the holy mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear'. A divine meal set out for all those called to the Kingdom of God.

For us then this image becomes an indication of the earthly fellowship between human and divine made real in the person of Jesus. Before the coming of the new covenant such symbolic bread was kept in the holy of holies, the inner sanctuary kept only for the elite, the specially selected. In Jesus and this new covenant with God, no longer is the bread of God, special bread, kept in the Holy of Holies for a select few – that curtain of the inner temple has been torn and we are all drawn in to share in the bread of heaven.

The eucharist, then is an amazing act of hospitality by God to us – we might take this for granted and should step back to reflect on the power that is before us. No longer is Eucharist just a memorial; Jesus' words, 'this is my body given for you' and 'this is my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' take us to new depths and meaning in our relationship with God. To open this holy table to us God Godself is offering sacrificially to feed us, to refresh us, to renew us and heal us.

As we gather here we are not just sharing in a ritual – we are sharing in divine hospitality where once Abraham fed angels and now God feeds us.