

Bennochy church 12th August 2018

Have you wondered just how many stories there are in the bible are about crossing deserts. It's a common theme. And some, like the one that was read earlier, about Elijah, is actually a rerun, of an even more ancient story. It is a bit like a sequel. The starting place is different, but the destination of Elijah's journey, is hugely symbolic.

After his victory over the prophets of Baal, on Mount Carmel. In fear of Queen Jezebel, he enters the wilderness. He is a man on the run from the authorities. He has done nothing wrong, other than displayed the power of God and made their God look stupid. Where better to escape, than the desert.

Last week we were talking about bread and what sustains us in life. Here Elijah, we must assume on the verge of death, or at least that is how he feels, he just wants to lie down and give up. *"It is too much"*. I think we have all been there. Wondering how we will find the strength, the energy to carry on. The story goes like this; an angel, the word simply means a messenger, supplies his needs, bread and water, and he is then able to continue the journey. If you want to, set aside the miraculous. The point of the story is that Elijah is somehow sustained and able to walk 40 days, to reaches Mount Sinai.

We have been here before. A journeying people, recently slaves in Egypt, wandering though the desert, complaining about a lack

of food and water, who are miraculously guided and sustained by God. Where do they end up? Mount Sinai. The same destination as Elijah. The parallels between these two event and people is very strong. How long were their journeys? For Elijah, 40 days. For the escaping people of God, it was 40 years. The number is not important. It is symbolic. Stating that the journey was a long one. I have to believe that these parallels are no coincidence. In a real sense, Elijah is making the same journey, as the people of God did all those years before.

I don't want to over emphasise the possible parallels to be taken from this story and how we might apply them to ourselves. But it is a distinct possibility, that we can see something of our experience, in the journey of Elijah.

There are fears that can drive us in certain directions. Make us make certain choices. Maybe ones we did not actually want to make in the first place. A bit like being in the desert. Those moments in life where we just need to survive. Not sure how. But we do, and we look back with wonder that we got through it. Sometimes we feel like giving up. It all seems too much. Our energy for the fight, has gone.

We might identify certain moments in life where we can say, with some certainty, that event, changed my life. We are now

moving in a totally different direction from before, maybe not even sure where this journey will take us.

Those moments in life where we have taken a bit of a risk, not knowing if it will all work out. We have become explorers, pilgrims, entering new territory and often that is not a comfortable place to be.

At all these moments, what sustains us, when the journey is tough and the way ahead seems unclear? What sustains us, when the world seems a very dark place and we are not in control of events round about us.

The great thing about the stories of scripture is this, the people in them were not perfect. The people of Israel were always complaining to Moses, and Elijah wants to give up. Hope is at a low ebb. Trust has just about drained away. We can only see what is in front of us. It is as if their escape from Egypt and Elijah's victory at Mount Carmel has been forgotten about. At these moments, we don't look in the rear view mirror. I suspect, just to survive, we need to stay in the moment. Getting through each day as it comes.

The American poet, Henry Longfellow, said "*the lowest ebb is the turn of the tide*" Maybe where hope begins and trust starts to rebuild.

The tide turned for Elijah when he met God at Mount Sinai. God asked him, "Elijah, what are you doing here?". He was there to

meet God. It was not the end of his journey, but it was a new beginning, as it was for the people of God, who famously, in the hands of Moses, were given the 10 commandments.

In life the journey never ends, but it is full of new beginnings. Moments where hope is rekindled and faith reborn. From the cries and smiles of Rebecca and Susie, to deep experiences of love and compassion and to times when we know our spirits touched by God. In these moments, God is there. God is life. God is love and God is spirit.

Neither Elijah or the people of God knew what the future held for them. The journey, as important as the destination. It is the same for us. We travel in hope, trust and expectation, precisely because the way ahead is unknown. In our future, new challenges and beginnings await around every corner. That is life, but with God, we never travel alone. Amen.