

SERMON PREACHED AT SJH TRINITY 9 WEEK 18 YEAR B WITH BAPTISM

A childhood friend of mine had an older brother who was naughty one day at home. His parents sent him to his room with bread and water for his evening meal. After a while he came downstairs carrying his tray with an empty plate on it. “That was quite nice,” he said. “Can I have the same again with some tomato sauce, please?”

Bread and water: they can be seen as boring, but they’re the basics of life. No wonder Jesus used them when he was teaching people about the different sort of life he brought: the life of God which he shared, life that will go on for ever. Today’s gospel reading follows on from the feeding of the 5,000, which was read in church last week. Jesus had miraculously fed people on one side of the Sea of Galilee; then he crossed the lake, and the crowd gathered around him again. It seems they were hoping he would feed them again. Instead Jesus told them about the bread from heaven that God gives. They asked him to give them this bread. Jesus then told them that he was the bread of life. Whoever comes to him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty.

We have come to church today. Some of us are regular attenders. Some of us have come because we’re family or friends of Freya (10 am) / Elsie (11.30 am). Freya/Elsie is to be baptised – not that she has much choice in the matter, but she will make her own mind up as she gets older. For all of us it is an opportunity to think beyond everyday concerns (which are perfectly right and proper) to the life Jesus invites us to share by following him. This life gives a meaning to what we do in this world.

Most of us, when asked where we find meaning, would think about the people close to us: those we love, those we support and those who support us. We might think about our responsibilities for the human race more generally – and there’s plenty to worry about at the present time. Anyone who is baptised, or christened as we often say, becomes a member of a community, the church. Baptism reminds us of the heart of the Christian faith: the death and resurrection of Jesus. As I say when I visit people or families preparing for baptism, you see this most clearly when the person being baptised is totally immersed in the water for a moment. It’s the idea of dying to sin and rising to new life, symbolised by going down into the water and coming up out of it. This combines the pictures of water cleansing and giving life. It reminds us that God wants to forgive us when things go wrong. As a church we come together to celebrate what God has done in Christ and offer thanks.

So today Freya/Elsie becomes a new member of a family which stretches down the ages and throughout the world. We at S. John's are a part of that family. We welcome you and we share your joy.