

Lent 2 Luke 13:31-35

At first glance our readings today can seem a little mis-matched. We begin with a part of the prophecy of Isaiah where there is a promise of water for all those who are thirsty. We move on to a psalm of thanksgiving to God. The epistle reading tells of the faithfulness of God despite the many times God's people turned away from him. And finally, the gospel reading tells of Jesus prophesying his own triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent death there. Some weeks it is harder than others to find the common thread, sometimes we see different things in the scriptures from what was intended anyway! As this is one of those weeks perhaps there is a less obvious common message for us to find.

None of us can remember what it was like to be a baby, but we can all have a go at imagining it, through our experiences of watching young children. In particular, think about what the relationship is like between a baby and that child's parents from the point of view of baby. The baby books tell us, if we read them, that to begin with babies don't really know that they are separate from their mothers, pretty soon, though, they realise that they are and at that point develop skills to call upon parental help, usually in the form of yelling. A baby's cry is designed to make the adults around them drop everything and deal with the problem, we are hardwired to do that, which explains why when on an aeroplane flight where there is an almost uninterrupted chorus of baby yelling, we find that particularly unpleasant. It's not the baby's fault, it just that yelling is all that they have to express a need and we are hardwired to want to respond to that need, even if it isn't our baby.

The need can be anything from a survival instinct of being hungry or thirsty, too hot or too cold, in pain or it can be a sense of loneliness because baby can't see someone familiar, a discomfort from a wet nappy or simply feeling tired. As baby gets a bit older the reasons behind the yelling get even more diverse, frustration over being unable to do something or reach something they want, anger with another, fear as they can now imagine things that illicit that emotion. Later still, though, the baby grows through childhood to adolescence and into adulthood where, hopefully, more sophisticated means to express needs and desires can be found. Sometimes we revert to crying and yelling, sometimes that is the best we have, but usually talking, compromising, asking, suggesting, even insisting are all ways of meeting our needs and having our needs met. It is the natural process of moving from complete dependence to independence and it is a pattern each person follows to some degree or another.

So what has that little recap on human development got to do with the readings? Well when we read these readings it is possible to discern one particular thread that runs through them, not perhaps the most obvious message but a common one, that of dependence on God.

Isaiah speaks God's word when he calls all who are in need to himself, come to the water, you thirsty ones, come you with no money buy bread and eat. God recognises that when we are independent we must work for all we have, we must provide for ourselves, but he

longs for us to come and receive the gift of life which has been given free of our ability to earn it. The psalmist speaks of how that relationship looks, when a person accepts God's grace and relies on God, "My soul clings to you, your right hand upholds me", he says.

St Paul speaks to the Corinthians about the disobedience of the Hebrews and their attempts at self-reliance which saw disaster heaped on them when all the while they were being cared for by God, Our forefathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea, Paul tells the people, they knew of God's power 1st hand and still they tried to go it alone, make a new god to worship, complain about what they lacked.

Jesus, finally, speaks that same longing that the prophet Isaiah expressed on God's behalf. How I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but you were not willing. Jesus wants to take care of us, to hold us close, to be like a mother or father to us because the reality is that our relationship with God is as unequal and far removed as our relationship was with our parents when we were the tiniest baby, or maybe a better analogy is when we were toddlers. We think we can do things all by ourselves, and lots of things we can do, but it is always slower and less successful when we go it alone, far better when we had help. Not that our parents didn't want us to learn and grow, they wouldn't do everything for us, but gently encourage, remind, support and demonstrate so that we could understand the best way to get things done.

So it is with our journey with God, when we first come to know God we can be overwhelmed by what he has done for us and find it difficult to do anything without reference to him, that's why new Christians can be a bit intense! They cry out in prayer loudly and publicly as a new born baby cries each time it needs something, anything. Later we learn to trust him to be there without the need for quite so much public reassurance. All the while growing in faith in him and love for him who, like a parent, already loves his children more than they can ever know.

Like our relationship with our human parents, we can become a little distant, even estranged from God, but God never loses sight of us. Our human relationships work as a metaphor but only in so much as they work when they are at their best, God is the ideal parent, the one who loves unconditionally but does not smother, the one who teaches free will and independence whilst always being there when we need support, the one who encourages us to walk our own road but longs to be our companion on it.

Lent is a time of self-reflection, perhaps this week is a time to reflect on our dependence. Are we dependent on self, God or something else? When we face difficulty are we confident to cry out to God as our loving parent? May we hear afresh Jesus' longing to gather us together in safety and be aware that the only thing that can stop him is our own unwillingness to be held. May you feel the warmth of God's embrace surround you this week, to God be the glory. Amen.