

Tenth Sunday after Trinity 2018 (5.08.18)

Exodus 16: 2 – 4, 9 – 15; John 6: 24 – 35

What a splendid pair of readings we've had this morning: manna from heaven and I am the bread of life – rich homiletic seams for the preacher to mine. They are readings stuffed full of material for sermons simply waiting to be unpacked. There's a theme to be developed about the sort of sustenance to be had from Jesus; and there's a theme to be developed from Jesus saying he is "I am." When Moses dared to ask God what his name is, God said "I am the I am." The great I am is God. And Jesus said "I am." Jesus associated himself with the great I am. The very nature of God is the sort of sustenance Jesus gives. Well, you preach on that all morning, couldn't you?

But, do you know what? I'm just not up for it. And I'm not going to make any pretence that the stream of consciousness I want to express this morning is any

sort of exegesis of these readings. It's got nothing to do with the readings.

Last weekend I was in Bridlington's twin town in Germany. It's called Bad Salzuflen. It's in the Lippe region of Germany, not too far from Hanover. I was there, of course, with the Priory Choir. We had quite realistic anxiety when planning the tour that the voices of the two most senior boys would break before we set off. But I'm please to tell you our anxiety was unnecessary: the concert we gave in the Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Bad Salzuflen was a tour de force that received a standing ovation amidst rapturous applause. Whatever you do, don't listen to any of the dreadful, tinny recordings of it that are going round Facebook. Actually, it was really, really, good.

And the hospitality we received from our German hosts was overwhelming. We had meals and beer – that's the adults did, at least – and we had trips out;

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and we exchanged gifts; and we said warm words about friendship and co-operation and understanding and peace.

On the Sunday morning the choir took part in the morning service at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Bad Salzuflen. And I preached. I had somehow to reflect on all this warm heartedness and commitment to mutual flourishing in the context of Brexit; in the context of the reality that we have about 13 weeks to avoid crashing out of the EU with no deal.

I'm not going to rehash that sermon, not least because my English text is published in full in the August parish magazine that is out today and available at the back of church. The German translation is being published in the Lippe regional newspaper. What I do want to reassure you is that it said nothing at all about the result of the Brexit referendum. In some ways I don't care whether we leave or remain: theoretically we can create a just and equal society in or out.

But what does concern me is that the process of having the referendum has exposed deep divisions within our society. And that damage would have been done, whatever the result had been. Two years ago the referendum introduced an insidious viciousness into our national conversation that has left us embittered with distrust; and which has given a platform and a voice to suspicion and hatred.

In Bad Salzuflen I dared to hope that we could resist all this by individuals at a local level being committed to experiencing each other's cultures, listening to each other's stories, increasing our understanding of each other and growing in friendship. I dared to hope that if we applied the teachings of St. Paul to our present context, and accepted the cost of discipleship, we could in fact see the gospel of Jesus being lived more distinctively; see the faith being applied with greater integrity; and see the Kingdom grow.

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And then I came home. And I discovered that the gay pride flag had been cut down from the Police Station in Quay Road and a hate-filled email had purported to justify it being done on behalf of the men of Bridlington. NOT ON MY BEHALF!

Actually, I don't want to say too much about the flag, partly because I don't want to give the oxygen of publicity to the sort of cretinous bigots who do things like that; and partly because I find it too upsetting. I've spoken to someone who, with tears in their eyes, told me they just felt like putting their house on the market, packing up and leaving. And I can understand why. Why would you want to live in a town where things like that happen?

Well, the reason I want to live in this town - and the reason I am absolutely committed to living in this town and serving this church - is that we have a vocation to be here. We each of us has a vocation as individuals; and we all of us together have a vocation

as Priory Church. And that vocation is simply to proclaim, by word and deed, that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

And when the Kingdom of God is at hand, there is bread from heaven - yeah! We've got back to the readings! - we proclaim the bread of life; the bread with the wholesomeness that removes all taste of bitterness and hatred and resentment; the bread of life that is available to all; the bread of life that leads us to appreciate that everybody is made equal and precious in the image of God whether they are straight, or gay, or trans; or English, or German; or brown, or white; or rich, or poor; or established in the same community for generations, or rootless and seeking refuge from warfare or injustice.

When God made a covenant with Noah; a covenant in which he promised that nobody would ever be cut off from him; the sign of that covenant was a rainbow. He said "When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and

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remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon earth.”

Our vocation is to ensure that the rainbow is seen in Brid.

Amen.