

Sentence

Come to Me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. *Matt 11: 28 -9*

Collect

Almighty God, Your Son Jesus Christ has taught us that what we do for the least of His brothers and sisters we also do for Him; give us the will to serve others as He was the Servant of all, Who gave up His life and died for us, yet lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. **Amen**

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 24: 34-38, 42 – 49 & 58 - 67

Eliezer, servant of Abraham said, "I am Abraham's servant. The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.' I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.'

"I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also"--let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.' "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. Then I bowed my head and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left."

And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes." Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Psalm

45: 10 – 17

Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear: forget your own people and your father's house
The king desires your beauty: he is your lord, therefore bow down before him
The richest among the people, O daughter of Tyre: shall entreat your favour with gifts.
The king's daughter is all-glorious within: her clothing is embroidered cloth of gold
In robes of many colours she is led to you, O king: and after her, the virgins are with her
They are led with gladness and rejoicing: they enter the palace of the king
In the place of your fathers, you shall have sons: and make them princes over all the land
And I will make known your name to every generation: therefore the peoples shall give you praise for ever

Epistle

Romans 7: 14 – 25

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

GOSPEL

Matthew 11:15 – 19, 25 – 30

Jesus said "Let anyone with ears listen! To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

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NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

The story of Eliezar's journey back to the north to find a wife for Isaac is a lovely one, with rather beautiful outcomes. It certainly indicates Abraham's concern that his family did not mix with the local tribal people, and that may have had more to do with family rather than 'racial' issues. This tale, if not well-known, really ought to be

Psalm

As I have commented before, this psalm sounds more than a little like royal propaganda than anything else to me, and being selected here possibly indicates the selectors' connection with the OT lesson. Otherwise there is not a lot that is of much other use.

Epistle

If there is one thing that has to be said for Paul's writings, it is that he had no compunctions about revealing his own human struggles – 'the good that I would I do not' – although my own response to some of this is that I cannot blame 'sin' for my own short-comings any more than I can blame 'Satan.' It has long struck me that our present-day avoidance of personal responsibility has a lot to do with the breakdown of living and relationships. Even when I do wrong, I have to confess that I *do* 'understand my own actions.' Mind you, there is no doubt that if I turn my back on the Gospel and Spirit, then I would be most likely to retreat into self-directed living, and show up as 'blow you Jack I am all right.'

GOSPEL

A previous and now deceased Archbishop of Sydney used to comment that someone had ‘dribbled a bibful’ when what they had to say expressed an enormous amount of sense. And this is the case in the first part of today’s selection. The further I go on living the more I am amazed at the extent to which people, individual and corporate, can be so schizophrenic, so to speak, in attitudes to things, events and people.

Jesus must surely have had a twinkle in His eye when He underlined the total inconsistency as people expressed their response to the Baptist and to Himself. Opposite excuses were given for refusing to respond to either – how pathetic and obvious. Certainly, the Baptist was the strict regimentalist, and our Lord rather more laid back. One might find John’s approach rather difficult to swallow, but surely not our Lord’s. But this is what people do, in their attempts to evade any response or responsibility to what they must know to be true. And we need to be aware of that evasion.

On the other hand, one of the significant reasons, seems to me, that Jesus had more to do with the ‘infants’ of this world was not that they were naïve, but that they were more likely to be fair dinkum. Proud and pretty people tend to be far more concerned about their own importance, and sidestep reality and truth far more easily. And the higher one gets in the social strata, the more this tends to apply.

So Jesus seems to have had a soft spot for ‘little people,’ *and I have to admit that I go along with that, too.*

NOTES FOR A SERMON

Recent comments by people of the Church have left me wondering somewhat on what basis they hold their faith. They have talked about a great lack of knowledge of the Biblical stories – and while they may not be all that significant stories, what facts have they to build on?

There is no chance of sorting out that problem by a single sermon no matter how powerful, but I do bounce off part of today’s Gospel to raise an issue that is both ancient and modern. It is that ironic comment by our Lord on people’s response then to the ministry of John the Baptist, and His own. Whilst there seems to have been quite a contrast in approach and understanding of the Faith and even of God, the reverse responses indicate a rather deeper fault in human integrity.

Certainly, the Baptist would have been a rather fearful antagonist. Never the one to mince words, John would tell it like he saw it, no holds barred, and not a lot of room for politeness. His conversations with those who asked what they should do in response to his preaching, the Baptist was unequivocal. His requirement that soldiers be content with their pay would not get past the ACTU, for instance. And when he told King Herod what he thought of his latest wife, she was the one who became murderous. It may well have been because of John’s upbringing, as many scholars seem to think, with the Essenes, that rather narrow Jewish sect, rigid and disciplinarian, that led to John’s rather stringent view of God. Like many of his own time, and before, John expected a somewhat cataclysmic reaction from God, vindicating Israel’s view of life and history and making Israel the centre of the universe. That is what messianic expectation looks for.

Small wonder that John was disappointed in his Cousin! ‘Are You the One Whom we seek, or do we look for another?’ Jesus did not fit the picture in John’s head, even though it was not long before all this that he had baptized his Cousin in the Jordan. John’s strictness had the response from many people turning their backs on him because he was too hard to cope with. Because he was so upright and rigid, people decided to move away from him on the grounds of ‘demon-possession.’ Notice how easily people will maltreat those whom they choose to isolate. They tried the insanity card to avoid having to take notice. The guy is a nut-case, he is possessed (which was the 1st Century equivalent of saying that we do not have a clue what is wrong with this bloke but he is beyond all help.) You will recall that the crowd’s response to Jesus was to mock Him, before the Crucifixion. Purple robe, rod for a sceptre, and that crown of thorns, - not a symbol of torture, but of mockery. The sharp ends pointed out, not in.

When it came to Jesus, at this stage of His ministry, the crowd’s response was really quite pathetic. If John was too rigid and stiff, Jesus was far too laid back. His action – for instance – at the wedding at Cana showed that He was not averse to people having a good time. His treatment of sinners *appalled* the holy ones of Israel. So the contradictory approach of people showed up, all of it attempts to avoid taking the slightest notice of anyone who looked like disturbing their comfortable way of life. Doesn’t it sound like people today? Doesn’t it sound like people of any day and age and culture?

One of the things that has bothered me constantly is that this Gospel of ours has to do with singularly significant answers to huge human problems, and it calls for honest, committed action and reaction from people. It

is not a naïve or useless answer to needs, it is totally suited to the issues, and provides answers that can be tested and found to be worthwhile and true. One would have thought that this would be exactly what thinking, caring people would grab with both hands. Thankfully there are many who do; but there are millions more who turn their backs on reality – and in doing so, chase after castles in the air. What fools we mortals be!

Sunday 10th July, 2011

Fourth Sunday of Pentecost

Sentence

The words that You have spoken are spirit and life; You have the words of eternal life.

John 6:63

Collect

Bountiful God, we thank You for planting in us the seed of Your word; by Your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy and live according to it, that we may grow in faith, hope and love, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 25: 19 – 34

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.

The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Psalm

119: 105 – 112

Your word is a lantern to my feet: and a light to my path
I have vowed and sworn an oath: to keep Your righteous judgements
I have been afflicted beyond measure: Lord, give me life according to Your word
Accept, O Lord, the freewill offerings of my mouth: and teach me Your judgements
I take my life in many hands continually: yet I do not forget Your law.
The wicked have laid a snare for me: but I have not strayed from Your precepts
Your commands are my inheritance for ever: they are the joy of my heart
I have set my heart to fulfill Your statutes: always even to the end

Epistle

Romans 8: 1 – 11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law--indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin,

the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

GOSPEL

Matthew 13: 1 – 9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Jesus then added "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

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NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

This is a sad story, and may well have more than a ring of truth about it, as it conveys something of the genesis of the tribal tensions that still wrack the Middle East. Idumaeans were never the taste of the month for Israel, and the connection may stretch further than Edom. It may well include much of the Arabian peninsula.

Whilst this story indicates Esau's disinterest in family and birth-right, it may also be the expression of tension from the other side of the 'fence.' History is always written by the victors, not the vanquished, and that needs to be remembered in any situation. There is no doubt of the dishonesty of Jacob, 'supplanter' as he was nicknamed, and he does not show up at all well. That applies both to this tale and to subsequent history between the two soon-to-be patriarchs. Perhaps the favouritism shown to these two young men from their parents indicated something of the source of the problem. However, it is a recurring theme in families, sadly.

Psalm

This surely should be a familiar section from the Psalms, even coming as it does from the longest psalm of all. That first verse has been really quite formative in my own life and faith pilgrimage, and whilst initially I followed because of its divine genesis, that developed into a rather more significant discipleship because that word proved its validity in life and thought and growth.

Epistle

If you found difficulty with my perception of Paul's letter in previous weeks, I have to say that this one has been formative over my lifetime, although I have to add that my perception of what is being conveyed has moved ground considerably too.

I have great difficulty with mysticism, Christian or otherwise, considering it to lose touch with the down-to-earth Gospel of the Incarnation. Likewise I had difficulty with the sort of pious religion in which I grew up, for that part of the Church seemed to present a Gospel that was otherworldly, and out-of-touch with reality.

So when I look at this passage these days I see once again the contrast that is common to the New Testament that presents itself in different modes: the contrast between living as a follower of 'Adam;' and being a

follower of Christ. Controller as opposed to Servant. Demander in place of Offerer. Or if you like, flesh and spirit. Falsehood and truth.

GOSPEL

This Parable of the Sower ought really to be renamed as *Parable of the Soils*. Any gardener would tell you that, surely. And one wonders why the disciples failed to get the gist of this teaching of Jesus. It rings true not only in the hearing and responding to the Gospel, but it also is true in hearing and responding to what is real and solid and necessary in life.

In other words, the seed is not responsible for the failure to germinate nor for the size of the crop. It has everything to do with the receptacle for the seed, the ground into which it was put.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

And one wonders if there is need for a sermon after that Gospel

Sunday 17th July, 2011

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Sentence

You O Lord are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness
Psalm 86:15

Collect

O God, You alone can order our unruly wills and affections; teach us to love what You command and to desire what You promise, so that, among the changes and chances of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Old Testament

Genesis 28: 10 – 19a

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.

And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place--and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel.¹

Psalm

139: 1- 11 & 23 -24

O Lord, You have searched me out and known me: You know when I sit or when I stand, You comprehend my thoughts long before.

You discern my path and the places where I rest: You are acquainted with all my ways

For there is not a word on my tongue: but You, Lord, know it altogether

You have encompassed me behind and before: and have laid Your hand upon me

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: so high that I cannot endure it.

Where shall I go from Your spirit: or where shall I flee from Your presence?

If I ascend into heaven You are there: if I make my bed in the grave, You are there also

If I spread my wings towards the morning: or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Even there Your hand shall lead me: and Your right hand shall hold me

If I say, ' Surely darkness will cover me; and the night will enclose me'

The darkness is no darkness with You, but the night is as clear as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike

Search me, O God and know my heart: put me to the proof and know my thoughts

Look well lest there be any way of wickedness in me: and lead me in the way that is everlasting

Epistle

Romans 8: 12 – 25

Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

¹ Heb for House of God

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

GOSPEL

Matthew 13: 24 – 30 & 36 – 43

Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Let anyone with ears listen!

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NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

Mention has been made before of the slow evolution of the perception of God, as the Abrahamic sagas rolled on. This particular experience of Jacob was one of steep learning curve, the leaving behind of old superstitions about the gods, and the realization of God being omnipresent.

The old (pagan?) view of the gods was that, whilst within the range of their territory, one was under their protection; however outside of that jurisdiction, a person was very much on their own. Here was such an eye-opener that Jacob could no longer live under such a misapprehension. Not only was that old furphy demolished; Jacob was promised the land where he was. Once again, this covenant included the responsibility for people other than his tribal connections.

Psalm

Taking up the theme in the first lesson, this psalm brings the universal God internally to a person. Not only is God to be found wherever you go, but also He is aware of the innermost thoughts of each person. This may sound a little threatening to begin with, but on the other hand it is comforting to know that God knows us so intimately beaut things and not-so-beaut and still loves us.

Epistle

If you have been following the readings from Romans, you will not find it hard to lock into this progression from previously. Once again, here is a fairly logical progression from Jacob's discovery, to the explanation of the quite intimate relationship between a believer and the Spirit. Underlined is the beneficial nature of this relationship, and please note that being able to call God *Abba* – Daddy! – is stunning really. Mind you, lots of people may express the view that they do not *feel* such intimacy. I may be a starchy old bloke, but I would reiterate that the Faith is not based on feelings. This is the way God operates: bank on it.

And that is important to notice, for another of the ancient superstitions about the gods is that when things go wrong, either the god is impotent, or you have been naughty and you are cast into outer darkness. Just remember that neither of those perceptions are for real, and act on the basis of the reality. If you stop and think about it, if everything went swimmingly for all believers, and all was sweetness and light, we would become very pathetic and weak individuals, falling over at the slightest difficulty in front of us. God looks for maturity in people, not blandness. *And you cannot get the former without struggle.*

GOSPEL

And here it is in a parable of Jesus. This always bemused me when I was quite young. If God is God then all should go well in the world, should it not? And here is the denial of that process, from the very lips of our Lord Himself. If you think this is all rather too hard, then stop and see that at least part of the reason for this refusal to destroy the evil ones is *that there is no other way to allow them the room to repent, and grow and mature.*

I have often asked people to see how, in (Anglican) Eucharistic rites, there is often the line that talks about Jesus having overcome – or even destroyed! – evil. It used to worry me, because pray and try as I might, evil never seemed to be beaten in me or my experience. Then it was shown to me, by NT lecturers in fact, ***that when evil is shown up for what it is, then it is overcome, beaten. destroyed.*** When the reality is clear to me, then I can avoid involvement in it. In other words, I am still left with the responsibility of turning my back on it. I still must mature and grow. All a bit stunning really.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

I have told you the story before, of a man whom I have known and valued from teenage years. We met again several years ago after he and a mate had done a trip in the Flinders Ranges of SA where the geologist there had shown all the evidence of folding mountains and remarkable stonework. Striations of rock and soil have long fascinated me, and not far away lie the Ediacara fields where ancient remains had been discovered.

We talked of his recent trip, but he refused to go along with the age of the planet, convinced as a good Christian he thought he ought, that the world was completed on 23rd October, 4004BC, as Archbishop Ussher of Ireland had calculated from the Biblical ‘evidence.’ When I asked him about the evidence of evolution and so on, he looked at me rather sadly and stated that he was convinced that God simply made it look like that stuff had happened! He could not, would not see that in fact He was making God look more than a little stupid. Evolution is not on for rather too many Christians.

If find that strange. There was a time when I was two little bits of nothing that met in the right place at the right time. As a result I was born – on 23rd October would you believe, which is why I remember Ussher’s dateline. But I am not those two little bits of nothing these days. I have evolved, both physically and intellectually, and have not stayed static at all. Had I done so, I would possibly be found in one of those establishments that tries to cope with people who have not been able to develop.

In other words, evolution has always been a part of human experience, as it has been of natural life in the universe. Had that not been the case, we would still be walking on four feet, living in caves, without language, culture or thought. Whilst our evolution has also had its downside, for humans can be absolute rotters, we are far, far better off than people of even a century or so ago. I am using a computer doing this, although I imagine pen and paper would have worked OK. Mind you, I can send this around the world in moments – which is not the case with stationery!

Evolution.

Lots of people have complained about the Biblical Faith and its recommendation of destroying non-believers because of their lack of faith, and the harshly judgemental approach to non-conformists in the early parts of the Old Testament. Abraham was required, at one stage, to offer up his son Isaac, and seemed prepared to do so, until a substitute was provided. In his life at Ur, it may well have been that child sacrifice was if not normal then at least was part of the possibilities in worship of the gods. But just as in today’s Old Testament Lesson Jacob made a life-changing discovery about El, so in both cases, those people were able to move past their preconceptions to a clearer understanding of the nature of God.

As you can see from the notes above, each of these readings, in their own particular way, point to moves forward and widening perceptions of the nature of God: in Psalm and Epistle, and particularly the Gospel. It behoves us all to ponder that growth and development, for without it we remain static for ourselves and rather useless for others.

What I find helpful in both of the last two readings is the way in which the matter of strife and difficulty are woven into the matrix of this development. None of us are particularly happy if and when strife, discord or other harsh issues make life complicated and hard. Many Christians are particularly beholders to the view that God blesses His people and ensures that all goes smoothly for them. This view must make things hard when suddenly life takes harsh turns for them. Rather than question their assumptions, they make another which goes something like 'I must have done something wrong to deserve this!' and become buried in guilt and despair. Mock not! I have had to help people past such appalling misunderstandings of life and of God. *And it is not easy for them!*

As I have tried to underline, and Jesus does it best in this parable, you are called to be a disciple in the real world, and like our Lord, know, experience and understand what it is like to be human and alive on planet earth. That means facing up to the sharp bits of life, ponder why, and realize the greater wisdom behind why the Father requires us to operate genuinely.

It may well sound hard that evil and evil-doers are not wiped off the face of the earth. A moment's thought, surely, would make you realize that if God **did** act that way, then you and I would have been demolished years ago. I kid you not. But having to live in the real world, encounter all manner of steep climbs and learning curves, and find the way forward, means not only that you and I mature quite somewhat, *but also that we may now be of some use to those among whom we live and move and have our being.*

Many years ago, I had the occasion to consult my then Assistant Bishop with an issue that was being of huge angst to me. My Bishop was no help at all, for he had no idea of what I was talking. The Assistant Bishop was, because he knew what I was on about! He had been there, done that! In fact he talked about people needing a wounded healer - no one else would be of any great help.

Most of all was the realization that came when pondering why Jesus refused that legion of angels to destroy His persecutors before the Cross. What a damned good idea to blast them off the face of the earth! So why did He refuse? There are two solid and sound good reasons: the first was that to have acted that way would have **multiplied the evil** that was going on right there and then. Evil is not overcome not beaten by more evil, now is it. Possibly more important was that by operating the way He did, Jesus left the way open for those people to look back over what they had done in 'crucifying the Lord of Glory,' repenting of their evil, and changing sides in the great debate of life. Who of us have never made any mistake of enormous proportion, and yet have had the room to move and change, and progress and grow *And evolve? Why ever are we afraid of the word?*

Sunday 24th July, 2011

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Sentence

Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38

Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in You, without Whom nothing is wrong, nothing is holy; increase and multiply upon us Your mercy, that, with You as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 29: 15 – 28

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" Laban said, "This is not done in our country--giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

Psalm

105: 1 – 11

O give thanks to the Lord and call upon His name: tell among the peoples what things He has done
Sing to Him, O sing praises: and be telling of His marvellous works
Exult in His holy name: and let those that seek the Lord be joyful in heart.
Seek the Lord and His strength: O seek His face continually.
Call to mind what wonders He has done: His marvellous acts and the judgements of His mouth
O seed of Abraham His servant: O children of Jacob, His chosen one
For He is the Lord our God: and His judgements are in all the earth
He has remembered His covenant for ever: the word that He ordained for a thousand generations
The covenant He made with Abraham: the oath that He swore to Isaac
And confirmed it to Jacob as a statute: to Israel as an everlasting covenant.
Saying, I will give you the land of Canaan: to be the portion of your inheritance.

Epistle

Romans 8: 26 – 29

The Spirit also helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed

intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

GOSPEL

Matthew 13: 44 – 58

Jesus said "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.

He came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?" And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour except in their own country and in their own house." And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

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NOTES ON THE READINGS..

Old Testament

Before you get all thingy about Jacob having been badly treated with getting the wrong girl to be his wife, stop and realize that one of the best ways to teach someone how sneakiness damages and hurts people is for them to get a dose of it themselves. It was a lousy thing to do in our thoughts and cultural view, but it is not all that long in our own history and culture that younger women in a family were not married off before the older one(s). So this is a tale about a certain amount of come-uppance. Jacob had some more lessons in front of him to modify his pretensions.

Psalm

Before writing this psalm off as being so banal and traditional, stop and ponder what is being said here. If there was one thing that actually enabled Israel to move and grow and develop in their understanding of God, life and faith, it was the fact that He could be relied on the act consistently with Himself. (If that sounds flat, then with all due respect, ponder Islam where the only possible response to Allah is 'Submission,' which is what 'Islam' means. When one is never quite sure how Allah will operate, one needs to be ready to adapt.)

Epistle

I confess to having a time when Paul's letter to the Romans was a constant delight to me, but the further I have gone on, the less that is so. Mind you, this passage remains one of constant encouragement, as this picture of God, Father and Spirit, supporting those who follow Christ. The Apostle's view of predestination leaves me cold these days, as I am not at all sure what he is on about. The traditional view of this is hardly glorifying to God or encouraging to people, and there have been sects and groups who decided that if predestination is so, then there is nothing they can do to change that. Then it all becomes a little Islamic, feeling all one can do is to submit to the Invincible Will of God.

The final verse – certainly – offers something to hang on to even in the worst of times.

GOSPEL

I often wonder how Jesus' teaching and ministry really did come across to people of His day and age. Surely it would have made a lot of sense to some, but presented a lot of threats to others who did not engage in much thought about the Faith. Quite some of people's difficulties emerge when they are told to shut up and believe, as if that was the ultimate goal of all believers. Traditional people – such as these – seem to me only to dig great holes for them to sink into.

I find it fascinating that in this little cameo of short parables, Jesus was underlining what we looked at last week, with 'good and bad' having to live and grow up alongside each other, each coping with the other's influence. I would imagine that for a 'normal' believer of Jesus' day (or any other day come to that) would have had difficulty coping with the idea that God would not make sure that 'His People' never got the wrong end of the stick. Isn't faith supposed to protect one from all the nasties? *No, it is not.*

NOTES FOR A SERMON

One of the delights, for me, was the discovery many many years ago that the Hebrew Faith emerged **not** from some sort of dogmatic, bombastic statement or creed, but by the careful diligent, honest observation of life and its interactions. It is a realistic 'scientific'² approach to life and even religion, even though it meant, as time passed and experiences widened, that variations, permutations and combinations had to be included. Those ancient Jews were not averse, either, to taking something from contemporary wisdom and adapting it to their vision. Both the Creation Stories and even the Decalogue show something of that sort of activity and adaptation.

On the other hand, one of the great sadnesses of faith and religion (or at least of its adherents) is that strange capacity of refusing to go on in the search for truth, satisfied with whatever met them at their respective comfort zones at the time. For most of us, truth rings its own bells inside if us, does it not? Even if that ring is soft, it still evokes a desire to check it out and see how far the rune is able to run.

For that reason, I find the reactionary response of people to Jesus – as shown up at the end of today's Gospel – really does bother me. Surely – here – is little more than an attempt to avoid serious response to the sort of things that Jesus was saying and offering. A further comment or two may add to that dilemma.

In Jewish culture of the time, if or when someone came with some sort of message out of the ordinary and new, there was a process to go through to provide assurance either that one needed to take notice of such a person, or that they were justified in leaving it all on one side. The first question to be asked when in 'check-out mode' was to see if anyone knew where that person came from. If they were unknown to anyone, strangers and aliens, then one was quite entitled to suggest that they go and get lost. We do not know where you come from or who you are – go and bother someone else.

However, if you were aware of them, their family or their predecessors then you were required to give them a hearing and then ponder your response.

In the light of that, do you see how the locals of Nazareth split the difference so to speak, and while recognizing that they knew Jesus' family, still had the temerity to turn their backs on Him. 'We know all your family ...' but we will not listen. It may well have been partly on the notion that nothing of any great import could ever come from Nazareth, as Jesus' own *bon mot* would seem to indicate. However, the real issue is the quite ugly refusal of those people of Jesus' home town even to offer any response to Jesus except a bland and total refusal to listen.

And He did not many deeds of power there because of their unbelief.

I dare to make a further comment. It is interesting to note that Matthew did not call them miracles, but deeds of power. I find it interesting also that Matthew wrote about their **unbelief**, when I suspect it had more to do with their lack of honesty. Now belief is never based on thin air; it is always based on evidence. (If you have difficulty with that, then please go back a few paragraphs in these very sermon notes. What I am asking you to see is that Jesus had, in fact, provided the evidence for a more honest response, **and the people themselves drew attention to 'this man's wisdom and deeds of power.'** Refusal to face and follow the evidence is hardly unbelief- it is little else than sheer and utter dishonesty. *And no one can make such people get past their biases and bigotry. Now can they!*

² 'Science' of course, was never something of Jewish origin. Their genius was this perception of God. It is interesting to look back and observe the gradual development of Judaism, and its method of handling other and contrary perceptions over the centuries and millennia.

Sunday 31st July, 2011

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sentence

The Lord is near to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desire of all who fear Him, hears their cry and saves them.

Psalm 145: 18

Collect

Almighty God, Whose beloved Son for our sake willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross; give us courage and patience to take up our cross daily and follow Him, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Genesis 32: 22 – 31

The same night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, *for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.*"

Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Penuel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Psalm

17: 1 – 7 & 16

Hear my just cause, O Lord, give heed to my cry: listen to my prayer that comes from my lips.

Let judgement for me come forth from Your presence: and let Your eyes discern the right

Though You search my heart, and visit me in the night-time: though You try me by fire, You will find no wickedness in me.

My mouth does not transgress, like the mouth of others: for I have kept Your word on my lips

My steps have held firm in the way of Your commands: and my feet have not stumbled from Your paths.

I call upon You, O God, for You will surely answer: incline Your ear to me and hear my words

Show me the wonders of Your steadfast love, O Saviour of those who come to You for refuge: Who by Your right hand deliver them from those who rise up against them

And I also shall see Your face, because my cause is just: when I awake and see You as You are, I shall be satisfied.

Epistle

Romans 9: 1 – 8

I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit-- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.

GOSPEL

Matthew 14: 13 – 21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had

compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

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NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

Modern readers may not be aware of what preceded this passage in Genesis, and a fill in may be helpful. Jacob and his family were returning to their home country, and Jacob had heard that Esau was on the lookout for him. Having been a cheat and supplanter himself, Jacob was afraid that Esau was going to cheat him out of all he had. Hence the 'protection' of his family and herds and flocks.

This cameo of the struggle between Jacob and the angel was another step in Jacob's learning curve. The most interesting parts of this tale are first that it increased Jacob's understanding of God, and second (to me it is far more significant) the 'renaming' of Jacob to 'Israel,' *You have striven with God and with man and have prevailed.*

This is a very revealing aspect of Hebrew Faith. We have mentioned before something of the emergence of this Faith, and this incident heightens it remarkably. You have **striven** - indicating that the emergence of the Hebrew Faith, right over its long history, has come as an out come of the struggling search for reality. *Is there any other way to go?*

Psalm

In some ways this is an odd little psalm and may be seen by some as self-justification for whoever wrote it – and whoever took it literally so to speak. My main point is that I would not be able to be so self-assured that I was without sin to that extent.

However, the real point to be noticed, and it is a valid one in this day and age of relative as opposed to ultimate, that the author was completely confident of the nature of God and of His consistency with truth and justice. *One of these days, moderns will come face to face with the extreme shakiness of relative values, which being so changeable and unreliable leave people out in the cold. If you ever wonder why so many people lose their way these days, then here is one of the reasons – 'where the hell are the boundaries?'*

Epistle

Do not be surprised if you find Paul's exegesis of Scripture somewhat hard to follow (or swallow!) He was a product of his age, and yet what he comes up with is remarkably close to what you might, studying Scripture. (Mind you, Isaiah reached this same point quite a few centuries before!!!)

One can imagine the sadness for the Apostle who was quite prepared to suffer exclusion from God if it could mean the **inclusion** of all Israel. That is an astounding self-offering, and like his Lord's. And it has to be added that not all of Christendom is Christ's, for the same reasons as Israel.

What I delight in, pardon me, is that stunning recitation of the benefits that Israel had received, and largely ignored. *They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen* In our own day and age, the Christian Church has all the exact same gifts and benefits, and so often even committed people ignore them and look for something else.

To my mind, Anglican in particular have all of these and somehow manage to avoid receiving the benefits. Please look closer and deeper at all you have **and value it all.**

GOSPEL

Please ever read the gospel stories imaginatively – and do not be wooden about it. Too often miracles are treated as something Jesus did and we cannot, and the real point is missed. Jews loved their stories and pondered them at great length.

Who else fed people on (or at the foot of) a mountain? And why? And what was the outcome? Moses of course, - well God actually, but you get the drift. Manna and quail. And only just enough for that day, remember?

And here was Jesus saying 'do it yourselves,' and from the tiny amount the disciples had, there was far more than enough with all those basketsful left over. In abundance. Galore. Nothing stingy about God, eh!

NOTES FOR A SERMON

This may well be a matter of trivia for you, but I would like to report on one of my really quite steep learning curves, that shows up in this morning's OT Lesson.

I also report that I have been part of Sunday School, Bible Class and Youth Group since I was in three-cornered pants, and that makes it about 70 years or more. Then theological college, and Bible Study Groups for most of the years since. And it was not until this passage burst on my slow brain – many years ago now! – that the name 'Israel' means 'you have striven with God and humans and have prevailed!' That came to me with striking force for it sums up what really is required of any questioning believer: faith does not come drifting down on you like some sort of warm blanket, nor is it a matter of quietly accepting whatever is served up to you. **It is a matter of struggling with the issues until you find your feet on firm ground.** Struggle. Search. Even prove sometimes. As I often say to folk, faith is a choice a person makes on the basis of the evidence in front of them.

In that remarkable saga of Jacob, if you stop and think about it, the first struggle he had was with himself. Even in that long-past and somewhat unsophisticated time, it is hard to imagine that Jacob was unaware of his shortcomings, strengths and rather awful weaknesses. His clash with Esau opened some vast wounds, the results of which are still with us in the enmity still being expressed between racial groups in the Middle East. Then there was the comeuppance he experienced with the father of his wives. It was a neat but nasty trick played upon him – and it cost him quite a percentage of his life span.

And the struggle was with God as well. The incident in last week's OT Lesson and the realization that God was not bound by areas of influence like other gods. And the same God would have been at work in the man dealing with the manifold issues to be faced, as you experience yourself.

And that is the point: faith and life is a struggle. And that is the way it should be. Often enough I have commented that I – like you no doubt! - learn more from my boo boos, especially the massive ones, than ever I do from things I manage to do right and well. And learning, of course, is the real point; no learning, no progress. Just marking time, *Brothers we are treading where we've always trod.*

When I entered College all those donkey's years ago, I was foolish enough to consider that I knew the Faith pretty well and needed no lecturers to point me in the right direction. Pride, they say, comes before a fall, and great was the fall thereof. What followed in that four years of preparation was the almost total destruction of my remarkably naïve (view of the) faith, and the raising of questions that I had never – *never* - asked. That was quite frightening, I assure you. There you were with your feet dangling over the abyss, and as one asked the rather more pertinent question, very much more solid answers came. *And more questions.* One person I read of them wrote about the exhilaration of getting to the top of a mountain of question, and seeing a vista of unimagined beauty – as well as a further range of questions well overtopping where you had just reached. And the confidence that arose from reaching that peak left you looking forward to the next exercise of questioning and exploring, and discovering. ***It also left you quite fearless of any outcome.*** For in the end, if this faith we profess can not cope with any question put to it, if our Lord is not able to cope with little old you and me putting Him under the microscope, and it is all lies and falsehood, *then the sooner that is established the better. I am totally uninterested in following and false god, no matter how sacrosanct.*

(Now, that's enough hard work for one sermon, is it not?)