

John 6.25-35

Deuteronomy 26.1-11

Our first reading today came from the book of Deuteronomy. It's presented as a farewell address from Moses as he approaches death, shortly before the people are about to enter the promised land. Moses starts with some of the history of the Jewish people and their interaction with God. The middle chapters then cover the statutes and laws which the people must be careful to observe as they enter the promised land.

Today's reading shows what should be the attitude of the people towards this new land. Foremost is that this is the land that the Lord your God is giving you. As they settle down and grow their crops, they are to offer the first fruits of each harvest to God, through the priest at the time. An acknowledgement that the crops are not just the result of their own work, but a gift of God.

As they do this, they will recall their history. From their travel to Egypt, and a hard life where the Egyptians treated them harshly. Then to how God had freed them. There's no mention of the courage required of Moses to confront Pharaoh, or how long the journey took and the problems along the way. The times they needed water and food – wouldn't it have been better if we'd just stayed in Egypt, they said. At least there they had plenty of bread (Exodus 16). Remember, also, when Moses spent too long on Mt Sinai, and the people persuaded Aaron to make a golden calf as a god (Exodus 32). All this is left out. The emphasis seems to be on how God heard their calls for help and brought them to a place flowing with milk and honey. God has given them the land and its fruitfulness. In response they give back to God. We could see this as we should interact with creation.

I found some interesting comments on remembering history. There's the well-known saying that "those who cannot remember their past are doomed to repeat it".

Presumably a reference to not learning from your mistakes. But in contrast to that is the idea that "those who remember history too vividly are doomed to be enslaved by it".

We can see that when we look around the world. "Make Our World Great Again", for example. We might look back at what our world or society was like at some time in the past. We might notice things that could have been done better and learn from them.

Alternatively, we could see how hard done by we've been, or that we have been taken advantage of. Does that lead us to plans for revenge? Or to feel there is no hope for us?

When I look at the state of the earth today, and the way in which we humans are treating it, I do feel rather pessimistic. Is there anything we can we do? It seems to be a lost cause. I said this to one of the participants at a Sustainability Workshop. His response was that we have to try anyway. I often think of that.

What could today's gospel reading have to say about sustainability and creation? It follows on from the feeding of the 5000. The people who have been part of this miracle are keen to catch up with Jesus. He's not exactly welcoming however, suggesting that they're only interested in getting free bread! Instead, he challenges them to see beyond the physical loaves to the meaning behind them, to what Jesus stands for. That the purpose of God is not just to provide *us* with free bread. Believing in Jesus is to share in God's love for the world. How we treat God's creation is part of that love.

Tom Wright points out that it's easy to over-spiritualise Jesus' comments, to suppose that he is unconcerned with earthly bread. Even though he has just fed the 5000! Tom goes on to say, "Greedy abuse of the physical world makes dualists out of the morally sensitive." I wasn't quite sure what to make of that, but it seemed worthwhile to try.

First, I had to check on the meaning of *dualist*. In this context, it seems to mean a person who believes there are two distinct parts to reality – the physical and the spiritual. That the two parts are fundamentally different. The *morally sensitive* will be those who are especially aware of the moral dimensions of a situation. So, let's try and put all this together. Suppose you want to be greedy and abuse creation. You could justify your actions by saying that this is in the physical world, it doesn't matter what I do there. My loyalty is to the spiritual world, and the two are quite separate. Your greed is justified because you're a dualist. Seeing the two worlds as quite separate.

The problem comes if we believe that creation is a gift of God. Then surely we need to see a spiritual dimension in how we treat the earth and everything in it. We need to see loving our neighbour as a mix of the physical and the spiritual.

It's like the debate between faith and works. Are they separate dimensions? If someone is naked and lacks daily food, what good is it to say to them 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet not supply their physical needs (James 2.15f).

In Tom Wright's words, Jesus invites his hearers ... to taste in him the bread of life, and to find heaven and earth united in the promised land (Twelve Months of Sundays, Year B, p. 93). An appropriate challenge for us in this season of Creation. And one to remember as we celebrate the Eucharist, the bread of life.