

Bennochy church 19th June 2016

We have all been in the wilderness. Those tough and hard moments of life. Those times of despair, where we can't imagine how we will get through this, to get to the other side, when once again we will be able to laugh rather than cry. The journey of life is one of shades of light and dark, but there are times when we feel we have been plunged into a pit darkness, with very steep sides and seemingly no way out.

There are moments when we live in a world surrounded by our pain, anxiety, or grief. We feel nothing else, and words of comfort and support don't seem to penetrate the barriers, of this inner world that consumes us. For that moment in time, all is dark.

In spite of his great victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and the subsequent end of the drought that had gripped the nation of Israel for so long, we find Elijah in the midst of the wilderness. He is in fear of his life. King Ahab and queen Jezebel are out for revenge.

For a whole day he walks into the wilderness. So would Jesus. This is a personal journey. Let us journey with him. In the solitude of the desert, we can feel so alone. Whatever we face, we feel we are facing it alone and even if surrounded by family and friends, it is easy to think we have to cope with life's pain, all by ourselves. We look at others. The world seems normal to

them. Everyone else is going about their business and we ask, do they not see what I am going through?

No one's life is easy. We might look at others and think they have it all, but dig a bit deeper, and everyone carries their burdens through life. We all travel through places coloured by the shades of dark and light, but there are those moments in life that are darker than others.

Elijah is at his lowest ebb. You cannot get any lower than wishing your life away. I don't know if these are suicidal thoughts or just the cries of a man who cannot take any more. He sits down in the shade. So would Jonah. Both men gripped with turmoil. He is not able to continue the journey.

The problem is, life never stops. Sometimes we want to put it on hold. We can't cope with everyday demands as well as our own moment of crisis. It is not that we want to give up, but we do want the world to stop, just for a while, so we can get off, to enable us to cope with what is happening to us. In a sense to isolate or insulate ourselves and our sorrows, from the world. To sit quietly in the shade, in the midst of our wilderness moment.

Sleep may not come naturally to us as our minds whirr with what is going on. Questions come to us as we try to sleep. The darkness of the night seems to compound the pain of heart or

mind. Why has this happened the way it has? Why has this happened to me? This was not deserved. In spite of his fear and loneliness, sleep over takes Elijah.

I wonder if we understand those moments where we have been touched by God. Angels come in many forms as messengers from God. And somehow we find the strength to journey on, to arrive at a place where we are met by God. Here is the hard bit. Even though the promise is true, even in the depths of our despair, there are times where God keeps us waiting. Our encounter with God is a place that we still need to journey to. We cannot for ever sit in the shade and simply wait. Built into faith is the perseverance of the journey. Elijah travelled 40 days to come to the holy place of God. As he journeyed, we can only guess at his thoughts and his state of mind.

God is not always easily recognisable. Our cry's seeking that which is powerful enough to remove our pain. It is the God of the earthquake, wind and fire, that's the God we want to meet. To take away our pain or give us the pain of the one we love. That is not God's way. As pilgrims, our burden remain to be carried.

Elijah believed he was a good man. Standing firm for God. Serving only him. The last of the prophets. We discover that is not actually true. But that in itself did not make him immune from fear or despair. How often have fallen into the mindset of looking another's pain and saying, they did not deserve that!

Elijah finally came to recognise God in a voice that was a soft whisper. You can almost imagine him straining to hear above the noise of what had gone before. Against the noise of the world, what it offers, and its pain, do we strain to listen for the voice of God. As we later share in bread and wine, let us listen for the audible stillness of the presence of God.

One of great passages that records the words of Jesus is this, *"Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest."* (Matthew 11: 28)

In life, our fears, our grief, our worries are not removed, but Jesus says, let me take some of your burdens. Let me walk beside you and take some of the strain. How often have people said, I am not sure how I coped with that, but somehow or other, I have continued the journey. I have come out the other side with faith intact. Elijah teaches us that we can be more open to God in despair than in victory.

So angels visit us. In spite of all that was happening, Elijah was able to carry on his journey into the presence of God. His victory secured in the still small voice of God. Life is not easy. The pilgrim journey is not easy. But the promise of Jesus is there, to help us bear the load in our pilgrimage through wilderness times. Our victory secured in the words of Jesus, *I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life.* Amen.