

Notices

Prayer event 8pm here on Wednesday
August 23rd Praise in Victoria Park Marquee Praise
from 5pm

Harvest Supper Sat 12th Sept

Website / communications

Standing committee afterwards

Hymns

9th August - God our provider

1024 All my days

825 Faithful One

793 You are my hiding place

852 Here is bread (communion)

354 Jehovah Jireh

Refrain :

Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too
much for you.'

Go ...'in the strength of that food'

Summary

Today we're thinking about the spiritual journey, the need to be sustained and where that strength to carry on comes from.

If you filled in your own spiritual health check what would you write?

Recently you completed a healthcheck for this church and the results were analysed and used as part of our Vision Day which was vital in working out our priorities going forward. We prayed at the beginning of the day that God would be present and direct our discussions and I can confirm that the Holy Spirit spoke through a number of people. This was both challenging and inspiring. There will be further vision days to work out how to put these priorities into action. But what of you? If a healthcheck were conducted on you what would it say? If you wrote it, if those who know you best wrote it, or if God wrote it?

It's tempting to respond, 'Could do better' but if we're not careful we can easily view God as a disappointed parent and that the we have to find our own inner strength to achieve more and more, losing sight of the fact that we cannot give what we don't have. We cannot give what we

don't have and one thing is for certain if we don't draw strength for the journey ahead and take a rest from the journey so far travelled we will not be able to serve as Christ among this community. The message we convey is, Come join us and be exhausted and frustrated! Feel like a disappointment to god and guilty that you never do enough.

In our reading Elijah is tired out and fed up to the point of wanting to die. Talk about despondent, but then he did have a tough job. He was to tell the king, Ahab, to mend his ways and turn from Baal worship and idolatry. Ahab was described as the worst of all the kings and his wife Jezebel, well her reputation needs no spelling out.

What do we already know about Elijah?

At times persistent courageous and encouraging, 17.13 Elijah says to the widow of Zarepath 'Don't be afraid'.

Elijah also has great faith – pouring water onto the wood at Mount Carmel before asking God to set fire to it.

At other Elijah was times despairing.

Elijah was the first of the major prophets, raising a boy from the dead, parting water, stopping the rain – how then is his experience relevant to a seemingly ordinary Christian testimony today?

I've often drawn comfort from the reminder that the bible records extraordinary people and events and that these are a selection of things that took place, some of them quite weird,

18.45-46 'Meanwhile the sky grew black with clouds the wind rose a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel'

In other words like Dash, the boy from The Incredibles who is able to run superfast Elijah is able to out run the king riding on horseback

If we're not careful we can compare the miracles and battles and heroism of biblical characters and conclude that our own testimony is not relevant or effective. This is to miss out on the extraordinary power of testimony that each of us has to the sustaining and life-giving power that we receive from the Holy Spirit to live ordinary lives

in extraordinary ways. When we live in the light of hope and transformation and resurrection to eternal life everything changes.

This was so evident at the funeral of Margaret Bishop last Wednesday where the impact of a life of service and friendship was represented in the many people who came to acknowledge her influence in the community. But also her daughter Joanne was able to draw on strength in order to read out a tribute that was affirming affectionate loving and funny. It was a believer's funeral that was indeed infused with strength laughter and hope.

Elijah is fleeing from the pursuit of Ahab and his wife who are intent on destroying the true prophets of the living God. Idolatry is the spiritual battleground and Ahab is guilty of many crimes. Elijah has been given the power to withhold the rain from the land until the king repents. During the time of drought Elijah was fed by ravens, then by a widow and here by an angel. Water and food gave him strength but so also did the presence of the angel. The fact was, God

cared enough, God sent help through surprising means. The Lord worked then and works now in mysterious ways.

Does the heat of summer drain your energy, what else drains you – is it a sense of failure, a sense of enormity of the task, would you rather God let you give up?

If we fix our eyes on Jesus and not on the task ahead we will find our strength is renewed like an eagles and then we can soar, but we must eat of the living bread. Clearly Jesus is the inspiration but also the giver of eternal life.

Can you talk to God for a moment about what it is that you think He's calling you towards and ask Him to reassure you that you will have everything you need for the task?

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What advice would you give someone else who is feeling weary or despondent?

Imagine now you are not the patient but the doctor using our healthcheck analogy, what advice would you give someone who said that in

terms of their spiritual health, could do better? Is the patient drawing from the wells of salvation, feasting at the table of the living Lord Jesus.

Come to me all you that are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Together we are greater than the sum of our parts but isn't it true also that this body of Christ can only be as healthy as its individual parts. True the hand cannot say to the eye 'I don't need you' but if either is unhealthy that will affect our ability to read the music or to play the notes, to choose the right paint or to hold the paintbrush, to read around a subject or to type up our essay, to read a recipe or to stir the mixture.

The passage from Ephesians 3 last weekend refers to Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Growth

¹⁴ When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, ^[a] ¹⁵ the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. ^[b] ¹⁶ I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. ¹⁷ Then

Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. ¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. ¹⁹ May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God

How have you been strengthened in your faith?

We have a compass point, North to navigate by. The legacy of faith is that we have treasure in earthenware jars, which we draw upon even when uncertain about the journey. We draw upon that but can fail to notice or acknowledge that we have that sustaining priceless hope and faith looking heavenwards and keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus the author and perfecter of our lives. As I get older, life gets more uncertain more nuanced more suspect, I don't trust statistics, rendition of events becomes more and more a function of personality, memory, life experience – how can we know anything for certain. Yet also as I get older God seems more certain more

permanent makes more sense not less. Do not let your hearts be troubled trust in me lean not on your own understanding, Christ like trust.

It is Jesus, rather than our knowledge and understanding, who is the source of our calling and the source of our strength. What makes it good news is that, in those moments when we understandably have enough of this life that we cannot trust Jesus, Jesus has not had enough of us. So, rather than turning to our knowledge, perhaps we can turn to Jesus, recognizing that we certainly cannot have enough of him. When put that way, it is a wonder that we aren't so drawn to the Bread of Life that we double back into the line for communion in order to get seconds.

Why doesn't God reveal himself today so that we too might be strengthened and people would turn back to God?

We can think of Elijah going from mountain top to mountain top on his journey from Carmel to Horeb. Those mountain experiences are memorable and often fill us with life, especially when we have transcendent experiences of God. Yet Scripture stops here to focus on the horizontal

experience rather than the vertical experience. This reading challenges us to see how God was present to us in the boring parts of our journey

For those who have eyes to see God does do extraordinary things in the lives of those who put their trust in him. I've known people who experienced healing for example the woman suffering from RSI in both hands to the point where she could no longer type. Thing was, when she returned to the office, many people said that this miraculous healing was only her way of looking at things.

Many of the followers and witnesses of Jesus ministry quickly left when there was no more free lunch on the go or that things got tricky during the trial by Pilate.

We are to be signposts to the in-breaking kingdom of God through word and deed and our testimony to that truth will strengthen others in their spiritual journey.

What do you take with you for a long journey?
How do you prepare for it? I try to rely on SatNav

but know I have to use it in conjunction with common sense and even a paper based road map. The map doesn't include the latest bypass and the satnav seems not to keep up with junctions so I have to anticipate before I get there to turn left or right. Reading the signs can be confusing too when the destination town or city isn't marked. Sometimes I rely on where the sun is and always I have an acute sense of where North is – weird I know.

I get a stiff back if I sit too long, I get thirsty but then need the loo, I drink coffee to strengthen myself but sometimes I spill it. There's the dilemma of sandwiches or rip off at the service station. Tiredness kills, take a break say the signs, there's one at junction 18 on the M4 but I'm nearly home by then... to really benefit from the roadside Cappuccino and Blueberry Muffin you have to take time out, not using the drive through Starbucks. To recharge your batteries you need proper time and rest. So it is with your spiritual strength, you can't microwave relationship, you can't drive through with Jesus and have much eternal bread to sustain you

Do you ever think about the fact that in Jesus day the only bible around was the Old Testament and that his life not only made reference to the events of the OT but that Jesus became the OT! The Word made flesh and dwelt among us. So Jesus not only fulfilled prophecy upon prophecy but inhabited all the qualities and characteristics of the God of the OT. This is worth remembering because God is the same yesterday today and forever. Where parts of the OT are taken out of context we can conclude that God is not a provider, not compassionate, not loving what with all the slaughtering and battles and sacrificing.

There's an amazing example of the compassion of God even in the Elijah chapters of the books of Kings. Ahab repents and God withholds his judgement until the next generation. God is patient long-suffering and desires that none should perish but come back get up and feast upon the life-giving spirit of God.

On your spiritual journey are you resting in a wilderness at present or engaging fully in the spiritual battle? What are you doing to sustain or

strengthen your spiritual life and the life of this church?

Disciples need disciplines, motivation and encouragement. Elijah was given a tough role and at times he was full of faith and courage. But here he was low and tired.

There was a report once of a church member who had failed to resist temptation and gone off the rails badly. The response of the leadership was to say One of our soldiers has fallen, let us go to his aid and take him back to the hospital tent for rest and strengthening. Only then would they touch him gently and say get up eat and be on your way, resume your duties in the field.

Ask yourself, who is wounded around you, can we strengthen one another in love and service and words of comfort and kindness. We can. But nothing will sustain and strengthen us for the forty days and nights in the wilderness for which we need the bread of heaven. The bread that offers us eternal life is the body of Jesus himself of which we partake.

On Wednesday we are having an evening of prayer and praise – please consider carefully what could be more important for you than asking God to fight our spiritual battles for us and to give us the strength to play our part?

To show us how to grow this congregation. There's no silver bullet when it comes to growth either spiritually or numerically but for certain if we aren't a prayerful people how can we know what to pray for how can our prayers be in line with God's will?

So now as we come to communion let us imagine the Angel saying to us
get up and eat Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.'

Go ...'in the strength of that food'