

John 15.1-8

This is the last sermon of an unintentional series of three addresses. It represents three out of the five times I have preached since Holy Week when my mother Heather was still alive and since Tuesday of Easter Week when she died. None of this was intentional, but a preacher cannot help but reflect theologically on the key events of life and death, for they come to us all. So I apologise in advance if any of this feels self-indulgent, but then again, we all lose parents one way or another. The other two addresses are on the cathedral website.

Mum's funeral was in our family parish church in Poole. Mum and Dad were married there 55 years ago, exactly on the spot where her coffin stood. I found my vocation there as a server and the rest is history. St Peter's is a great Anglo Catholic shrine, and when I was a lad it felt huge, holy ground, filled with incense and clergy all dressed in black. It provided the classic catholic model of the vision glorious, the threshold of heaven.

This time, St Peter's felt really small. Had I got bigger? Our Lady Chapel is about the same size I realised. And this time, I was stood next to Mum's coffin, as the preacher, because the new vicar didn't know the family. It was strange to go back into the womb in both ways, but I was privileged to be able to say a few words in our parish church. Parish churches still cover every inch of our land, and although we live in changing times, they are still there, in every community, loved, ignored, untidy, holy spaces. Today's Gospel image of the vine being Jesus and the branches being his church spread across the land is easy to follow. I could even imagine myself and my siblings and Mum's grandchildren as branches from her vine of love and generosity.

Places are important to us. That place was and always will be important to me. This place is and always will be important to me. Places give us an identity and a sense of belonging, not unlike parents and families. Places can endure like this place and places can pass but all places are places in time, for their time, long or short. So are people. We are people in time, and Mum's time was up.

Words from the Funeral Service;

For he knows of what we are made, he remembers that we are but dust. Our days are like the grass, we flourish like a flower of the field, when the wind goes over it, it is gone and its place will know it no more. But the merciful goodness of the Lord endures for ever and ever toward those that fear him and his righteousness upon their children's children.

Jesus the True Vine was a person in time, and a person of place. It is easy as we encounter him in scripture and sacrament that we forget that rootedness of the Son of God. In Christian theology the existence of God has always been framed by person and place. Creation is the will of the personhood of God, choosing to act in time. The Universe may be limitless, beyond our imagining let alone our understanding but God chose here and now for revelation. And the word was made flesh in a particular place which some of us know well now, and in a particular person. First God came in the person of Mary through the place of her womb. Then Jesus was born into the local, family reality, so that God could be known by us, and we can be known by God. We follow Jesus who was a real person, in a real place, at a real time, and that is how God chooses to be one with us. It is an audacious reality, so radical yet so basic, that some miss the point, looking for God in the more magical or the more sensational.

This is why Jesus uses the picture of the vine. Yes it needs to change, to be cut back even, but the vine is forever one with the branches, and the local is forever one with the universal. And so if we believe this, and I do, then the mere inconvenience of death cannot separate us from the vine. This is the point, that the basic human need for a home in the world - a rooted and just society for all - is embraced by Jesus, but in paradox. The way home is through the pruning, through death and loss, giving up one's place for God's sake in order to find it again, in a new form called resurrection. It is to this new reality, that we the branches are being constantly called. Or in fancy theological words, *salvation history* (the record of God's activity in the world), is also *salvation geography*. God was, and is, and is to come, and will be, here and now and for evermore, yesterday, today and forever - that is the Vision Glorious.

We are people in time and we all belong to a place. But by following Jesus, we also become attached to the Vine, and his time and place, which is everywhere

and forever. The Kingdom of God is therefore a future reality when all will be well and all manner of things will be well, and it is here and now, in this place and time, here among us, and in our gift to share. We are, you are branches of the Kingdom Of God and your time is now, and our place is here and now. Alleluia.