

I am with you! (Exodus 17. 1-7; Phil 2. 1-13.)

Sunday 27 September 2026, Trinity 17

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- How are you feeling this morning as you look at the world, our society, our community.
- Do you feel in need of the encouragement and consolation Paul speaks about in our second reading?
- All around we see wars and geopolitical conflict due to ambitious leaders, who seem not to care the enormous suffering they wreak.
- And in our society profound hatred of the other being expressed on our streets and in social media.
- And within our own community sickness and stress have tested many of us.
- This summer we have been living through perilous times.
- The consequences of climate change are evident in severe heat waves and the resulting dramatic fires all over Europe and the US, floods in China and Japan, dreadful heat in India.
- The catastrophic glacier and mountain collapse in the Himalayas.
- A huge El Nino amplified by climate change is on the way, projected to cause 450000 deaths by February next year
- It is not just us humans suffering, animals, birds, sea creatures, insects and plant life are suffering, much of it down to human exploitation.
- It seems as if there is little we can do to turn things around.
- Where is God in all this?
- I think part of us wish an omnipotent God would act as he apparently did for the Israelites, defeating their enemies, providing water out of the rock.
- However, I am not sure we fully understand the origins and context of the whole Israel story, and God doesn't seem to intervene like that in our world.
- Individually there is little we can do to curb Donald or Putin or Netanyahu.
- We pray for peace, and while regimes and evil men will inevitably fall, there has always been conflict and suffering, and it seems there will continue to be.
- But maybe in terms of climate change we can and should do our bit, avoid holidays that require international flights, walk rather than drive, eat less meat, plant trees etc.
- But big business campaigns against net zero and the reduction in the use of fossil fuels, so our efforts can seem to make little difference.

- Money talks louder than our dear old planet.
- We have to face it climate change and the suffering planet are due to human selfishness and foolishness.
- God seems to leave us to get on with life as it develops.
- Does he not care? Are we doomed?
- Does Paul's message to the Philippians have anything to help us understand and give us hope?
- Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus.
- This passage reminds us that God in Christ took on human flesh. God became part of the WHOLE created order.
- Like all living things, his flesh was composed of the star dust created in the big bang.
- His incarnation made him not just a human, but part of the whole evolutionary tree of life.
- Elizabeth Johnson, the Catholic theologian, refers to this as **deep incarnation** in her wonderful book "Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love".
- We can make the incredible assertion that Jesus Christ the one transcendent God who creates and empowers the world, freely chooses to join the world in the flesh.
- God in Christ became intimately part of the whole web of life.
- Just as human life is interconnected and interdependent with all the animals and plant life on earth, so in taking human flesh God is a creature of earth, a complex unit of minerals and fluids, an item in the carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen cycles, a moment in the biological evolution of this planet.
- The genes of the cells in his body were kin to the flowers, frogs, fish, finches, foxes, the whole community of life that descended from common ancestors in the ancient seas.
- Absolutely mind boggling!
- And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.
- God experienced profound suffering and death. His death was the result of cruel human decisions by political authorities.
- They could have decided differently. Instead, the power of empire rolled on at full throttle and this prophet from Galilee paid an excruciating price for fidelity to his ministry.
- He knows the terror of abandonment, remember the cry from the cross: 'My God, My God why have you forsaken me.'

- Here we have an astonishing new chapter of God's relationship to creation, namely, "I am with you" in the flesh even unto an agonising death.
- Having tasted the dregs of rejection and physical agony, the crucified Christ knows what it means to suffer. In his own body, he knows. This knowing is embedded in the very heart of the living God.
- This is utterly shocking, we don't expect divinity to suffer and die. In Christ the unfathomable depth of God's unconditional love is revealed.
- Far from stripping omnipotence away, divine participation in suffering expresses the kind of power God actually exercises. It takes omnipotence to be able to love like this.
- Calvary graphically shows that the transcendent God of suffering love abides with all creatures, not just human beings, the hunted bear, the terrified hedge hog on the road, to every sparrow that falls to the ground.
- So God is with us. God doesn't promise to take away the suffering or death, God promises to be with us, to share in it.
- So wherein is our hope?
- As Peter says in his second epistle "in accord with God's promise we await new heavens and a new earth, where justice dwells" (2 Pet 3.13)
- It is belief in God that does not stop halfway, as Teilhard de Chardin who you have heard me refer to before argues, life on earth is a journey that follows the road consistently to the end, the Omega point.
- The Alpha who had the first word over our lives is also the Omega who will have the last word, and it is the same loving word: "Let there be life."
- To believe in the resurrection is not to believe in a scientific miracle. It is to believe in God.
- It is an act of hope in the God who created you and everyone else and everything else, who has the love and the power still to recreate, even when death has taken away the only life that you know.
- After all the suffering and destruction of this summer's heat waves, if we look we can see evidence of resurrection all around us. After the rains the new shoots of new life appear. The brown fields have turned green.
- In July I travelled through the wonderful mountain area of the Cairngorms. The next day it was on fire. I literally cried, it is an area that I love, and had spent many wonderful holidays in when I was a teenager.

- If you want to understand my love of the Cairngorms read what is reputed to be the finest book ever written on nature and landscape, “The Living Mountain’ by Nan Shepherd.
- The destruction was horrifying, and yet a few days later I read an article about an orange fire fungus that had been observed amongst the burnt debris.
- These charcoal-loving fungi get to work and prepare the way by gradually creating the sorts of conditions and nutrient that will accommodate plants and grasses.
- If we have eyes to see, the creator God constantly empowers new life even out of death.
- I have been reading a remarkably encouraging book by Cal Flynn - **Islands of Abandonment** about how nature fights back when human activity has damaged and destroyed.
- With God death can never be the end, it is always a precursor to new life.
- Not wishful thinking then, or an unverifiable curiosity, resurrection hope is rooted in belief in God the creator, the giver of life.
- We marvel at the wonders of creation, the mountains and seas, all the living plants and animals including humans. Through the wonders of evolutionary life God brought all this to life. It is on a journey that God empowers, and in which we share to a new heaven and new earth.
- Again as Paul assures us in his letter to the Romans, Creation, the universe and earth itself, all creatures and plant life, will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. —(Romans 8:21)
- Our lives may frequently feel like a vale of tears, but The Eucharist that we will share together reminds us that God suffers with us, that God knows about abandonment, that God experiences death. It also reminds us that our creator God is a God of life. Resurrection comes inevitably after death
- That’s the mind-blowing promise, and on the journey we are assured, **I am with you.**
- **Amen**