

11 January 2026 ... 6.30 Evensong Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Joshua 3 1-8, 14 to end

Hebrew 1: 1 - 12

The unknown writer of Hebrews seems to have been writing a letter of encouragement to Jewish converts to Christianity who have lost their way somewhat.

It made me wonder about how hard it must be to leave one faith for another and whether it is harder than it is to go from no faith to belief in a divinity. And also whether the cultural changes might be even harder to assimilate than the mental transition.

Fear of not hitting the right note for any of us evangelising, however low-key we might be doing it, is one of the things which makes us hesitant to do it, isn't it?

The letter writer has taken the approach here of reminding his audience of the through story from their known scriptures, highlighting how everything has come to a point in the person of Jesus.

They have been confused about how to place Jesus in their faith view and in explaining how he is greater than the angels the writer works to define the nature of Christ.

The relationship between the Old Testament and the New is different depending on your starting point. We who are Christian read it differently to Jewish readers. We are always seeing, because Jesus himself used them in this way, the links forward – as the references are used here – but using these references only makes sense if you suspend the literal, and for want of a better metaphor accept the poetry of the ideas in scripture. To someone who doesn't accept Jesus as the Messiah, all these references have their own meaning, set in their own time.

But my spark for this evening's reflection, as it often does surprisingly, comes from the Old Testament reading, and from the notes in a Jewish commentary bible.

In verse 10 we find a reference to the living God.

Joshua said, 'By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites ... etc

Now my apologies, because it is only after I had finished writing these thoughts that I realised this verse falls in the missing gap of the chapter set for this evening. The notes said this refers to the VITALITY of God.

'Living God' is a phrase we find throughout the bible, not hundreds of times by any means, but by several of the prophets and in the New Testament, memorably in Matthew 16

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

PTO

And also a couple of chapters later than the one we heard, in Hebrews.

For me, the word 'vitality' means more than just alive, it expresses someone glowing with life, full of inner energy, inspiring.

Of a God it seems to describe one who isn't remote, static, active only in the creation and nothing since. So alive in fact that Jesus can live amongst us.

To me, it's always surprising to think that the scriptures, the gospels particularly, describe events of 2000 years ago. It feels that they could have happened yesterday give or take the odd historical detail.

And I have a real sense of a close and continuing presence, an active listener to my prayers – and to yours – I feel that especially when you pray for me and for those and those things I care about, so I thank you deeply for those prayers.

For me now – and I suppose this might change – and reflects perhaps that I enjoy a materially comfortable life – the living presence of God is more important to me than the promise of eternal life – even though it was the immenseness of that promise that first drew me in to faith.

I love that my role as Reader gives me reason to spend time with the scriptures, to ponder upon them in a small way, and to put that into words which might hopefully help someone else. It is hard to find time to do these things amongst the other calls on our time but building up our personal sense of belief can root us. So I recommend you all take on the training to be a Reader! Or at least get involved in one of the groups run by folk here at St Alkmunds where you can test out what you think it all means, and try putting it into words. It will help you and might help someone else.

Amen