



29 January 2019  
The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany  
Choral Evensong  
1 Chronicles 29 vv. 10–16  
Revelation 3 vv. 17–20

## A Closer Walk with God

### Encountering God in the Eucharist

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*For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. 1 Chron 29 v. 15*

*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. Rev. 3 v. 20*

Yesterday, instead of writing this sermon, I went to the cinema, and I arrived early enough to watch the adverts. There was one which took as its background music a song by The Who which I used to listen to a lot in my teens: the song's called 'The Seeker', which kind of speaks for itself as one of those agnostic, searching kind of numbers; and in this advert it accompanied a pretty young woman looking for various of the goods of life, including travel, food, servile young men in pink, swimming, cute children, and parties. It pointedly left out the repeated punchline of the song's lyrics: 'I won't get to get what I'm after - till the day I die'. In fact, the advert replaced it: - 'You can get whatever your heart desires', it promises - when you go all-inclusive'.

Peter Townshend's silenced line, 'I won't get to get what I'm after - till the day I die' is nicely pitched between hope and despair, between judgment and silence. Will death bring an answer, or is there no answer to bring? The advert's title - 'Life's too short to say no' - is frank about the way it uses excess to corrupt your judgment and distract your hope: the fear of death is a potent retail weapon. It's up there, for me, with an old Nurofen advert, which used the wailing lament at mortality on Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* to sell a headache product while leaving out the little voice which whispers, almost inaudibly towards the end of the track 'perhaps I was frightened of dying'.

It is human to be frightened of dying. It is natural to desire plenty. And the good things, that plenty which enhances life, are goods in themselves. Abundance speaks of the presence of God. David piles up his treasure in a gigantic thanksgiving offering: among many other offerings 'five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron', along with a multitude of precious stones.

And, as he offers them to the presence of God in his Temple, he is overcome by the difference inbuilt into his human relationship with the unbeginning, unending Creator of all: 'But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?... all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee... For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding'. In the presence of the Most High, David remembers that he is a creature. That memory is wisdom, a truth which allows him also to remember that his goods are not him, that his fragile naked soul is in the hand of the Almighty, and that even in the face of his own destruction all things shall be well. He is poor, blind, naked: a baby only just born, a body at the point of death, the unadorned, poor, bare, forked animal. 'Your lovingkindness is better than life', sings the psalmist: and before the glory of God's presence it is possible, at rare and blest times, to be able to understand and feel this truth. If all that is good and true abides, if God's abundance fills all that is, we do not have to keep the world spinning all by ourselves after all. We can be brave enough to die. 'I said, ye are gods; but ye shall die like men'.

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So all thanksgivings have mortality at their centre, the moment of joy against the moment when the plenty runs out, when the heart slows and stops, when the eyes dim and the voices fade. Here, now, our rejoicing speaks of what we have; whenever we give thanks we celebrate a debt to a reckless giver. But above all the thanksgiving of the Eucharist speaks at its heart of a death, a death more recklessly given than any other of the gifts of being. It is unlike, and most like, your death and mine. It is the death of a mortal man, and it is the death of the one who holds all things in life. The world is appalled at his death; the world is indifferent at his death; it is beyond our imagining; it is before our eyes, a routine execution; it is a morsel of bread, a miniscule sip of heady sweetness; it is a feast which never runs out; it is a broken body and bleeding side; it is a voice crying that, after all, God has forsaken him and that after all there is nothing on the other side of life but silence.

Because the life and death of Jesus turns David's perception on its head: the presence of God is to be found now where once there was only a kind of despairing awe at the distance between divine and human: within beating human hearts, and weeping human eyes, and the desires of finitude for food, and companionship, and shelter for now. We have communion. God is here, living within the mortality which once filled us with such fear, and taking its fleeting moments outside time and into the circling dance of eternity. So do this, commands Jesus as he contemplates his coming death and breaks the bread and shares the wine. Do this in remembrance of me. Bring the crazy gift of God's own self into your moment, and make it part of your becoming. Nothing speaks so much of our need as food and drink; nothing will show us the giver's source so completely as the moment that we eat the death of God so that, as we make the grave our bed, we find the life of God is there also, recollecting all our forgotten dust and showing it to be an unimaginable treasure.

So do not let yourself be distracted by fear, or fooled into thinking that the things of plenty are your effective armour against the time to come. We are naked before God and before humanity. There is only the defencelessness of gift and thanksgiving, God in the gifts and in the human faces with which we share those gifts, when the Lord enters to sup with us, and we with him.