

# Leading us to the Streets

Glastonbury Pilgrimage | Benediction Homily | 2022

*John 13:1-17*

He looked nervous and out of place  
when he walked into the Foodbank.  
I'll call him "Sam."

Sam had just graduated from university  
and now, maybe, with so many dreams dashed  
and hopes from the distant past dissolved,  
he found himself in need.

He had fallen out with his parents  
and had lost that support  
so many of us have taken for granted.

I asked him if he'd like a coffee  
whilst he waited for his bags of food.  
A coffee.

Such a simple thing.  
Something I consume in ridiculous quantities  
every morning of my life,  
without giving it much thought,  
or being too thankful for it,  
to be honest.

"A coffee?" he said, as though I was offering him gold.  
"Oh, yes please. I can't remember the last time I had a coffee."

As we sat across the table  
over the coffee  
which I now valued so much more,  
we talked a little.

Sam told me about the problem with his parents,

and how he wasn't very good with money,  
"And, if I'm honest," he said,  
with his head lowered,  
"I drink too much."

But tomorrow,  
he was starting a new job,  
working in a Buffet Restaurant,  
and he could see the possibilities,  
even though he wouldn't be paid for some time yet,  
and probably wouldn't be paid as much  
as he once thought his university degree would bring him,  
there was some hope.

I never saw him again  
although, in the weeks afterwards,  
whenever I passed by the restaurant  
I wondered how he was doing.

I still wonder.

Some people,  
cling to you,  
stand out,  
stir you in some way,  
leave their mark.

I hope he's ok.

The people who find themselves at a Foodbank  
are many and varied.  
There are the ones you may stereotypically expect to see,  
and those who return,  
and you're not surprised to see them.  
Again.  
And again.

But there are others too.

Those who have fled from a broken relationship,  
the professionals, a former doctor or journalist,  
those devastated by drugs,  
the recently released from prison,  
the sex workers, the homeless,  
the full-time workers, the stay-at-home carers,  
those whose minds have been fractured by life,  
those who have lost their job,  
their home,  
their hope,  
who come to us, sometimes,  
with a sense of shame,  
or awkwardness.

Those who look nervous  
and out of place.

And here we are.

We, who dare to believe in Jesus,  
the Bread of Life,  
who fed the thousands,  
and dared to say,  
'Come to me all who are burdened by life  
and I will give you rest.'

How beautiful is this place!

And yet this is a place  
of ruins and lost glory,  
a place dismantled by politics  
and religious turmoil,  
five centuries ago.

This is a place where the past  
lies heavy upon us.

A fragile place  
of dissolved dreams  
and dashed hopes.

We should feel nervous here,  
and out of place.

Not because of the dismantled walls,  
the toppled stones of the past,  
and the lessons of history,  
but because of what we are doing here.  
Right now.

We should not be able to look at him –

upon the Sacramental presence of Jesus,  
the Body of Christ,  
which I consume each day, each week,  
without, at times,  
giving it much thought,  
or being too thankful for it,  
(to be honest) –

without thinking of Sam,  
and so many others  
whose hopes have been changed,  
or snatched from them altogether.

Those who need some hope,  
some friendship,  
a step up,  
as they step on.

On the night that Jesus gave us this beautiful gift of himself,  
a means through which we receive  
all the benefits of his death and resurrection,  
a constant sign of his presence,  
a sharing in his life,  
he also stooped to the ground  
to wash his disciples' feet,  
an act which unsettled St Peter,  
made him feel nervous,  
and out of place.

Jesus moves from the table  
to the grime that lies between the toes,  
from the food to the feet,  
from the sacrament to the sweat,  
from the sweetness to the street.

And we have moved through the street too,  
through this strange and fascinating town of Glastonbury  
with its way-out ways,  
and its alternative spiritual awakenings,  
moving with Christ, the Bread of Life,  
singing of the wonderful way  
in which Jesus is present among us  
in the Sacrament of the Altar,  
feeding us,  
leading us,  
changing us.

Maybe much of what we did  
through the streets,  
was a mystery to those who witness it,  
but, here, as you sit and sing  
and smile and love...

think of Sam...

and all those who are hungry  
for food,  
for friendship,  
for hope.

*“Lord to whom shall we go,  
you have the message of eternal life?”*

Ah, those words of St Peter  
which embrace both a sense  
of hopelessness and hope.

We have no one  
or nowhere to go to...

...we are hopeless...

but you, Lord...

are our hope.

Life is fragile,  
and full of ruined dreams,  
and hopeless situations,  
and toppled stones,  
and so often we feel nervous  
and out of place.  
Strangers in a strange land.

But our only hope  
lies in Christ,  
who is here,  
in our midst,  
upon this altar,  
feeding our souls,  
leading us to the streets,

leading us to Sam...

and Janet, and Laura...

and Tianie and Layla and Mohammed...

and Stephen and Bill and Barbara...

and Ahmed, and Derek...

and Sarah, and Sophie and James...

and Fiona and Spencer and Jake ...

and...