



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Wednesday Healing Mass 10th June 2020

Readings: 1 Kings 18:20-39 and Matthew 5:17-19

I wonder if you have ever seen the old film *The Wizard of Oz*? If not, this is a bit of a spoiler alert. One of the most memorable scenes is when Dorothy and her companions follow the yellow brick road and reach the Emerald City.

They are seeking out the wonderful and mysterious wizard of Oz who, with his magical powers, will grant all their wishes. Appearing as a terrifying voice in fire and cloud, he nevertheless seems a bit slow to keep his promises. Eventually, they discover that the terrifying presence in front of them is in fact a little old man behind a curtain turning a wheel, speaking into a booming microphone and projecting an image. The great wizard, is as he admits, a rather pathetic humbug.

I was reminded of the big reveal of the wizard of Oz by the wonderful reading we had from 1 Kings this morning about Elijah and the Prophets of Baal. Baal turns out to be a big sham, a humbug, just like the Wizard of Oz. But there the similarity ends. Baal was a decidedly unpleasant fake Canaanite fertility God, who required child sacrifice. The Israelites were warned about worshipping the Gods of Canaan before they entered the Promised Land, but for some reason the temptation was too strong. It was under King Ahab, one of the most evil of the Israelite kings, that Baal worship really flourished. God sent the prophet Elijah to confront the Israelites with the questions “How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” Had they forgotten the first commandment so soon? Thou shalt have no other gods before me. There followed a wonderful contest by fire – 450 prophets of Baal versus 1 prophet of Jahweh. The humbug God Baal doesn’t show up despite his followers’ hysteria and self harm. The writer comments ‘there was no voice, no answer, and no response’.

Elijah responds with great theatricality – soaking the altar with jars and jars of water, before Jahweh sent down fire, blitzing the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust

and licking up the water. And the writer tells us When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God.”

What does this story tell us? It suggests that we consider what might be our fake Gods. A fake God is simply the thing you spend most time on, assuming it is going to provide all the answers and fulfil all the promises. Does it crowd out your prayer life or your walk with God? Does it promise much but deliver little? If so, it is getting in the way. Like the people of Israel, we are made to be in relationship with the Lord, he has made a covenant with us. St Augustine wrote ‘You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you’. Until our relationship with God in Jesus Christ becomes the still centre of our life, other stuff will attract but ultimately leave us unfulfilled. Deep down we know this, but oh, we find it so hard to put into practice. We chase after the second rate Gods that are so tempting. Human pride, escapism, ambition, recognition, greed, lust. And wonder why they leave us always wanting more.

But because God is God, he never gives up on us.

That is the other thing this story tells us. That God remains faithful even when we are not faithful. God pursued his people Israel like a passionate lover, despite all their infidelities. He wooed them, drew them back to himself. And that is what he does to us too. No need for pyrotechnics anymore. For he sent his Son to be beside us, and his Spirit to be within us.

And now to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever.
Amen.