

We are playing with metaphor all the way through these readings to the point where Paul can say '*neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.*' Now isn't that an outstanding statement "*neither life nor death*" – which of course covers everything – neither death seen as a negative, that fear that dogs us throughout life, nor life usually seen as a positive, something worth living for, worth having, are ends or barriers in themselves between us and what truly matters which is life or death in Christ, in the love of Christ, in Christ's love for us, as much as our love for Christ. There's something going on here which transcends all our categories, our attempts to contain life or death within certain boundaries, a certain understanding that fools us into thinking we can have control over either, something that dares to go beyond life and death as of ultimate value. We were asked to pray for a man and his family facing a grim diagnosis of cancer and kidney failure - one could only guess their hopes and fears but we prayed and now hear that he's been admitted to a hospice and is hugely relieved, grateful, not in the hope of recovery, of more of this life, but that his death, his dying is taken care of (Well done Andy Burnham for recognising the value of palliative care before considering any bill for assisted dying.) He can die with dignity and with the knowledge that his family's suffering, as much as his own, is in some respect lessened. Now, with metaphor in mind, a clue to this may be the love Christ shows in his care for us both in his living and dying, in this story of "*the feeding of the five thousand men to say nothing of women and children* and in the knowledge he has that as he takes up the mantle of witnessing to God's love for all that John the Baptist has just surrendered so he too will be called to surrender his life for all, to bless, break and give himself as bread to us as we too live and surrender ourselves to hospice care, to one another's love made certain for us in Christ. This is the ultimate care that Isaiah is seeking and promising for his people, not simply good food in this life but this as a metaphor, and a bait ,for the life to come, which is an everlasting relation to a God who loves and cares for us whether we live or die -a life indeed on offer now whether we live or die. If we try to measure this simply in good things happening to us now we can easily invert or subvert the relationship by imagining that God is rewarding us for being good or, worse, that God is at our beck and call whatever we do, when what is going on is a possibility far greater than anything we might allow or imagine, that God loves us in a manner which cannot be taken back or controlled by us – it's of infinite eternal value, a dynamic we are simply being asked to acknowledge, to enter in to, to enjoy, whether it brings life or death – something *no angel, no Prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come* can prevent. The man in the hospice like the man on the cross, is a sign of God's love for us – whatever comes.

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