

Reunited

Ezekiel 11.14-20

Today's reading is about God's promise to restore Israel to the Promised Land. The people of Israel have been scattered among the nations, but despite being dispersed far and wide God has protected them. Now he promises: "I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered and I will give you the land of Israel." This is not a simple question of a people being reunited. They are also going to be changed. God will "give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them."

This Thursday, many of our families are scattered. This is not unusual. What is extraordinary is that we cannot choose whether and when we are reunited. This is agonising ... nothing is harder than being deprived of choices, particularly when these are choices about those we care for most. But at least most of us are in familiar surroundings. However today we may wish to spare a thought for those who are stranded far from home, and with no prospect of getting back.

If you are currently able to move around the Island we are familiar with all the boats sitting off Sandown Bay. The majority of these are merchant vessels, and as an Island nation, seafarers from every nation perform a vital role in providing us with the goods that we need. However these seafarers are keyworkers we rarely consider. The challenges they face are considerable. The restrictions placed in ports mean that some are abandoned far from home, unable to return. Some are stuck on boats by quarantine arrangements, with no prospect of getting back to their families. Shore leave is being cancelled, which deprives seafarers of access to some of the welfare facilities that they need, and is incredibly destructive to their mental health.

To get an idea of how dependent we are on these workers why not look at some of the items in our kitchen cupboard. We think, quite rightly about the producers, and want to be sure that they have a fair deal. But we also need to think about the individuals who bring the food to us, all of whom are keeping us going, often in the most difficult circumstances.

Let us remember all those on the sea today. Portsmouth Cathedral prays every day for those at sea, and for all who support them. Let us use the cathedral's prayer as we give thanks today.

Creator and Father of all,

We pray for those who go down to the sea in ships,
and serve upon the waters of the world.

Bless them and those who serve their needs,
that they may put their trust in you
and find in you a strong anchor for their hopes
and so be filled with your peace,

through Jesus Christ, our Lord,

Amen

