

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Trinity 9

Exodus 16:2-4,9-15    Psalm 78:23-29    Ephesians 4:1-16    John  
6:24-35

In speaking and listening, writing and reading, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

so Jesus underlines all that he is teaching in this first passage from the long discourse John gives us in which Jesus carries us more deeply into the mystery, the sign of the feeding of five thousand.

Bread is a recognisable staple food across the globe, with evidence of a centrality in the human diet dating back through 10,000, perhaps even 15,000 years of human history, created from wild grains even before agriculture was embedded. Across the world today, its production is a central activity for the sustaining of life – the working of the land, harvesting, milling, preparation and baking central activities within communal life. In industrial society we are in danger of losing that connectedness, but the return to popularity of artisan bakeries, and, the fascinating turn to breadmaking that sustained many people through the early days of lockdown suggests that bread has a fundamental place in our lives: as something which sustains us and anchors our lives. I was intrigued to find that the Wikipedia entry on the history of bread begins:

“Bread was central to the formation of human societies”

This has a particular truth in the traditional history related in the bible of the fundamental forming of the Hebrews into the society that understood itself as the people of God, found in the book of Exodus. You may remember that in the story of the Exodus, such was the speed needed to leave Egypt that the Hebrews baked unleavened bread for the first “passover” meal before leaving Egypt, By the time they were out in the wilderness, as today’s Old Testament reading recalls, they became hungry and began to complain to Moses. God responded with the miraculous arrival of the manna – “bread of heaven”, one of the defining events of the wilderness journeys which the crowd around Jesus recall as they question him.

In Egypt, the place of slavery, the bread making was a hurried effort; in the wilderness, the pace of radical encounter with God, the bread was received as a gift, a daily gift through which the people learnt their utter dependence on God, and the need to trust the provision of God (do you remember, those who hoarded the bread found that it rotted and got maggoty overnight?) It's a dependence we recall when in the Lord's prayer we pray: "give us this day our **daily** bread".

The formation of each as a member of God's people, the society formed through encounter with God is a journey from the slavery of believing we have only our own effort, to utter dependence on the grace of God.

This is the journey that Jesus is leading his questioners through in today's gospel.

Echoing the passage from Isaiah I recalled last week, he says:

"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life"

They ask what work they need to do – what are the works God wants?

Jesus shifts from action to attitude:

"That you believe in him whom he sent"

The word "believe in" holds in it a sense of trust – almost "trust into him" "rely or depend on him" rather than the intellectual assent to truth about him, that has often been the meaning taken from it.

Jesus is primarily stating that it is not by doing things that we earn the payment of eternal life, and actually it is not by having what is deemed to be a perfect acceptance of doctrinal truths about who he is that we pass a test for eternal life, it is with deep visceral trust in his love and provision for us through all that we are living, that we discover the life for which God creates us, and in which there is no end.

He sums this up as being like our dependence on bread for life:

I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

This is what he has symbolised in the feeding of the five thousand. He asks his disciples where they will buy food for five thousand and then shows them that he can be the source of the food they need. It is within their relationship with him that provision is found, not in a way they can

control, but as radical gift, radical generosity which take us out of our usual parameters of thought and action.

In Bishop Robert's monthly letter for August he reflects on the connection between "holiday" and "holiness": and highlights that holiness is about how we use our time, and particularly about "wasting time" with God, not engaging in relentless productivity (my words not his!). It is perhaps a reminder that the story of the feeding of the five thousand on which Jesus reflects in this reading begins with his call to the disciples to "come away and rest". Putting all this together makes me wonder (and these are words for myself as much as for anyone else) whether our capacity truly to rest is deeply linked with our willingness to "believe in" trust/depend on the one God sent: Jesus. To turn to Jesus with our deepest and our dailiest needs and to trust he will make provision with us for what is truly in our interests, and for the wellbeing of all creations, is what allows us truly to rest as well as, in Jesus' companionship receiving as gift what truly feeds and satisfies us, which may not be what we work for under our own efforts.

This month, Jesus is going to hold us with the image of bread, seeking to open in us more fully the sense of our life giving dependence on him, as this gospel chapter unfolds further.

In the knowledge of this Biblical support, and at a time when our communion deeply focuses on Jesus as the "bread", I invite us all into a "holiday challenge" whether we are taking vacation or not, at home or away. It is the challenge of consciously taking seriously a call to depend on God.

With an openness that God's ways are not always our ways, whenever any need, problem, challenge arises in the coming month that would usually cause you great anxiety or speed you to overwork to overcome, this August can you create or renew for yourself the habit of first taking the issue to Jesus, with an attitude of believing in/ trusting/depending on him for his presence and life giving transformation of your approach to it?

Can we together make this a month of conscious awareness of what we are already receiving from God, day by day – to deepen our belief in the one he sent?

Jesus, Bread of Life: help us to receive the signs of your presence in our own lives, recognising you as the source of all that feeds and refreshes us, and finding rest for our souls in your companionship. Amen