

Sunday 12th August 2018
Trinity 11 (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: 1 Kings 19.4-8
NT: Ephesians 4.25-5.2
G: John 6.35,41-51

7 year olds preparing for their First Holy Communion have only one question. When can we taste the wine?

So the challenge then is to steer them away from this longed for event to try to bring them to an understanding of the true miracle that they are about to experience. As Fr Fergus discussed last week, ritual and the ordinariness of our everyday experience of eating together is a good place to start. People eating together share not just bread but a bond. Many of our earliest memories are of celebrations marked by food – Christmas, birthdays, family parties. The children got that and they came to understand that receiving Holy Communion

is not just about, at last, being able, to taste this strange looking bread and drink the wine but sharing in an experience that is important to their parents and grandparents, something that marked them out as older,

a progression in their church life, in their faith. Of course, the supreme irony is, that once we reached the final week of preparation and the chance to taste the wine, most of them thought it was vile and had to be persuaded that at least for their First Holy Communion, they should drink it!

Today we reach the part in Chapter 6 where Jesus wants to move on to explain the significance of the feeding of the five thousand and his proclamation

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 where the crowd begins to stumble. They followed Jesus because he healed the sick and then he gave them their fill of bread and fish. Here was someone they thought could meet their needs. The trouble is what they considered to be their needs were purely physical, good health, full bellies. Jesus wanted to offer them more but like the 7 year olds with the wine, they found that what he was truly offering was not what they had expected.

Jesus begins to teach the crowd telling them that he is the bread that has come down from heaven and reflecting the words of the prophets

“And they shall all be taught by God.”

This is too much for some. They know this man, this carpenter’s son from Nazareth. He’s overstepping the mark saying he’s come down from heaven. Their hearts are not open to the Holy Spirit. They are not willing to listen. If only they recalled the words of God written in Isaiah, they might have begun to see what was before them.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth,

making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Jesus, the bread that has come down from heaven is also the word of God, as John tells us right at the beginning of his gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Now John is linking these two images to portray just something of the power of Jesus, a man from Nazareth but also the Son of God.

Jesus rebuked Satan when he tried to tempt him in the wilderness

One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

This is his message to the crowd and his message to us today. We may come to Holy Communion week by week but God will not be able to accomplish his purpose for each one of us if we only look on it as bread and wine. We need to feed on Jesus, the Bread from heaven and Jesus the Word of God.

This isn't about Bible study versus services of Holy Communion. This is about being open to the grace of the Father which is bestowed through his Son in both bread and word through the power of his Holy Spirit.

When we receive Holy Communion we receive the Word of God into our hearts and we are called to act on that word that the will of God may be done and that his transforming power may be allowed to succeed.

“And they shall all be taught by God.”

It seems to be that we live in a time when many people's words are not to be trusted. Fake news.

Politicians manipulating words for their own ends. Throwing out outrageous descriptions of those 'other' than themselves in order to spark debate, keep themselves in the limelight. And all this makes the world a poorer place.

Jesus told Pilate that he came into this world to bear witness to the truth. Paul wrote to the Ephesians

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.

We are bound together through Holy Communion with all those who have gone before us and with those yet to come. And as one in Christ Jesus we are called to speak out his word of truth. If we start by telling the truth in small things, people will listen when we speak the truth of the love of God for all his creation.

Not all the crowd rejected Jesus on that day, many listened and were open to his teaching. We know this with certainty because that is why we are here today in this church, at this service, waiting to receive Holy Communion. Then, like them, may we, sustained by the Son, go out in the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfil the Father's will. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose