

Sunday 1st August 2021
Trinity 9 (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Exodus 16.2-4,9-15

NT: Ephesians 4.1-16

G: John 6.24-35

Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 9:35)

One of the games that I liked to play as a child was hide and seek. Most of the parents have played with their kids. One of the group of children would hide and the rest of us would try to find him or her. There was some excitement about the search and there was the thrill of finding the one who had been hiding. Maybe the game appealed to me as a child because it spoke to something deeper in me. There is a sense in which we remain people who seek after something all through our lives. We are hungry for meaning and purpose. We seek after happiness and peace of mind. We seek to receive love from others and to give love to others. We seek to meet people's needs. We are conscious and aware of deep desires in our lives and spiritual hungers.

Jesus had recently fed five thousand men, women, and children. The crowds were pursuing him because they wanted him to keep providing them with bread. Who can blame them? Wouldn't life be easier if we had a limitless supply of fish and bread appear on our doorstep every morning! While they were looking for someone to feed their hungry stomachs, Jesus was talking about providing them, and us, with something to satisfy a much deeper hunger. Jesus points to food for hungry hearts. There is something here about materialism, Jesus wanted to give us something that will feed our hungry hearts and souls. We all have hearts that are hungry for something. We can also be hungry for things like approval, rest, hope, and

so many other things. Our consumer society offers us short-term solutions that help to distract us from our deeper hungers, but never fulfils them.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes statements where he says, “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the true vine,” or as we heard today “I am the bread of life.” In each one, he invites us into relationship with God through him. Jesus wanted those who followed him to understand and discover spiritual nourishment after having their fill of fish and bread so that they would never hunger again.

One thing that always stands out to me when I read John 6:24-35 is that when the people asked Jesus what must they do to do the works God requires? Jesus replied that ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent’ (v29 NIV). In other words, the one thing God wants us to do is trust that Jesus is the one who can really satisfy our deeper hungers and thirsts. Jesus accepts us just as we are as an act of grace that we do not deserve. Jesus promises us rest as he carries our burdens for us through prayer and the love we experience in our community.

John had it right in the prologue to his gospel when he said, the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it. When we hear about the feeding of the five thousand, that miracle wasn’t primarily about food. Jesus wanted to use that physical reality of food to draw their focus away from the perishable and relate it to eternity, but they missed the point. Episcopal priest, Lauren Winner writes: “In calling himself ‘the bread of life,’ — and not, say, crème caramel or caviar — Jesus is identifying with basic food, with sustenance, with the food that, for centuries afterward, would figure in the protest efforts of poor and marginalized

people. No one holds caviar riots; people riot for bread. So, to speak of God as bread is to speak of God's most elemental provision for us."

Once a missionary to India asked his hosts about their diet. "What did you have for dinner today?" "Rice," came the reply.

"What did you have yesterday?" "The same thing."

"And what do you expect to eat tomorrow?" "Rice, of course. It gives me strength. I could not do without it. Sir, it is --" the man hesitated as if looking for a strong word. Then he added, "Sir, it is my very life!" Jesus invites the crowds to recognize the deep hungers— hungers that only the "bread of heaven" can satisfy.

In verse 30 we read "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "It's ironic, isn't it, that they ask him for a sign the day after the feeding of the five thousand? But Jesus doesn't seem to mind. Instead, he engages with the Exodus story.

Today in our Old Testament reading that's what happened with the manna in the wilderness that the Children of Israel received; in fact, "the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not." And then in our Gospel reading Jesus mentions that manna in the wilderness and calls Himself, "the True Bread from heaven," saying of Himself, "I am the Bread of Life."

Jesus is talking here about the deepest and most important need of every human being, which is to be in right relationship with God. In a famous prayer, St. Augustine once said to God, “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you”. The writer of Psalm 63 says this in the first verse, ‘You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.’

So much of our lives is spent working for the food that perishes. We must work to earn food and shelter and all the additions that make life enjoyable. For a fulfilled life, one should commit a portion of each day to prayer and reading the Bible, for that is the food that endures for eternal life.

When we hear Jesus refer to himself as ‘the Bread of Life’, we think of the Eucharist. Yet, in claiming to be the Bread of Life, Jesus is also making the claim that he alone can satisfy deeper hungers and thirsts of the human heart and soul with which we are born. At the end of our gospel lesson, Jesus uses the language of coming to him, ‘whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’ Our good works will flow from our relationship with him. In our gospel reading, Jesus is bringing us back to what is most important, our personal relationship with him, our daily coming to him and believing in him. This is what will really satisfy our deepest hunger.

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