

Holy Trinity & St Peter South Wimbledon Sermons

The Bread of Life (John 6.35, 41–51)

By Pamela Stevenson, Church of the Ascension Pollards Hill

Trinity 9, Sunday 9 Aug 2009

Here in this Gospel reading we have one of the seven Great I AM sayings of Jesus, which come in St John's Gospel. (*ask congregation to guess the other six*)

Jesus was using the most sacred and personal name which God had given to Moses – and which was too Holy for any Jew to speak. No wonder those who heard Him disapproved and grumbled. It was blasphemy to use the name of the Most High and how could he have come from heaven when he had human parents? It was rather like the time Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth when those who heard Him, could not believe that someone they had known since a boy, a local lad -could be making such grand claims and preaching to them.

Over these few weeks the gospel readings from St John are very sacramental – we had the story of the feeding of the 5000, now we hear Jesus teaching that He is the Bread of Life; and in the following chapters He teaches more about the meaning of the Eucharist.

In this reading today when Jesus is in conversation with the crowd, he tackles two distortions of what faith in God should be – distortions which are still with us today.

The first is to see God merely as someone who supplies our material needs. Of course Jesus tells us that we SHOULD bring our requests and our needs to God, but I think too often our prayer life consists of a list of requests. A bit like the child whose favourite phrase is "Can I have?" Or "I want" We tend to bombard God with our requests whether it is for ourselves or for someone else. And very often we don't allow enough time just to listen to what God is saying to us, or to thank Him for his many blessings.

The second distortion is to see God as the supplier of miracles to order. The crowd demand a sign to enable them to believe. Yet they have already seen many miracles and have not believed. If only they had read and studied their scriptures, they would have known who He was.

The people could not understand that the gift of God in Jesus is greater than any material gift could be. Christ came to nourish and sustain his people in both soul and body,

Jesus says "I am the Bread of Life". The gospels are full of references to meals, to celebrations. Jesus knew that these occasions are important to most of us. Of course we need food to sustain us, to help us grow and to nourish us; but we also enjoy the social side of eating; the parties, the wedding breakfasts. Perhaps we are enjoying picnics and barbecues during this summer (when the weather is fine). Meals can be an important time for families, of sharing, of bringing together all the happenings of the day. Sadly many families no longer sit down together to enjoy a meal, and may just enjoy a snatched meal in front of the tele,

And of course for Christians, the most important meal is the one we share together in church Sunday by Sunday – the celebration of the Eucharist – as we follow our Lord’s command to eat his flesh and drink his blood in remembrance of Him.

We often take it for granted that we can come in freedom Sunday by Sunday; but I often think of the time that Terry Waite was imprisoned and the nearest he could come to celebrating the Eucharist on Christmas Day, was in laying a tissue down, keeping a few crumbs of bread for the limited food he was given, and a few drops of water. He said the words of the Eucharistic prayer as closely as he could remember them – and that to Him was just as much a celebration of Holy Communion as if he had been in a church or a Cathedral. But how he must have longed to be sharing it with his fellow Christians and family at home.

We take it so much for granted when we have the freedom to choose whether to come, or not to come.

Because we come to this service so regularly it is easy to forget to prepare properly for receiving the body and blood of Christ. I find it helpful to have 3 intentions when I come; - something to say thank you for; something to say sorry for, and someone or something to pray for.

At the moment of course, in view of the swine flu precautions, we are advised not to receive the wine, but this in no way detracts from the nature of the Sacrament. Hopefully we will soon be able to revert to receiving in both kinds.

And then finally we have that wonderful passage from Ephesians which gives such practical advice as to how to live our lives; there is that famous phrase that is often quoted to couples who are getting married “do not let the sun go down on your wrath”. St Paul exhorts us to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you. And to live in love.

If only our world listened to and obeyed these words, what a much better place it would be. But it is down to us to live by example – like yeast in the bread – and to put our faith and trust in the one who is the Bread of Life. Amen