

SERMON – 8 AUGUST 2021 – EPHESIANS 4.25-5.2, JOHN 6.35,41-51



“I am the bread of life.” We’re working our way through John chapter 6, Jesus’ teaching that John has placed after the feeding of the crowd with the loaves and the fish. It is teaching which is loaded with so much else, 2,000 years of understanding of the Eucharist, of the bread we will share together.

“I am the bread of life.” Think about that – the importance of bread.

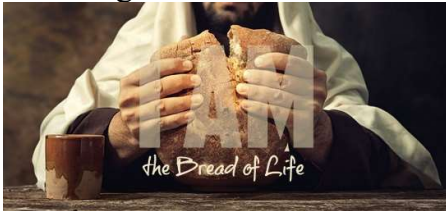


My great grandad was a baker – he had a bakery in Cambridge between the Wars. My mum remembered going to stay with her grandparents as a child, and lying bed listening to granddad at work, He would be up at 3.30 am, light the oven, then start preparing his dough, he made the bread, put it in the oven. Apparently great grandad was very musical, and he would sing as he worked. His repertoire was extensive – hymns, popular songs, Gilbert and Sullivan – mum said he never repeated himself. And at some point she would get out of bed, creep down to the bakery, and hope there was a little bit of bread fresh from the oven.

None of his descendants are great cooks – my mum wasn’t, and I’m certainly not (though I am better now than I was before lockdown) – nor do I have my great grandad’s ability to get up early. His dedication, his hard work - up at 3.30 every morning, day in day, because that is what you have to do. It is your job, and there are people relying on you. He had a bakery round, in one of the poorer parts of the Cambridge, the large working class estates just north of the railway station – a world away from the privilege of the University. I wonder how many people needed my great grandad’s bread as a staple of their diet. For us, a bread roll with the soup, a slice of bread and butter with our meat and two veg, it’s almost an extra. That’s something that’s changed in our lifetime – and think about all the variety of bread you can get at Bird’s or in Morrisons.



I'm sure great-grandad could make a wide variety of wonderful bread, but I expect that most of his output was the basics, what his customers wanted, what they could afford. [Zoom: I did a google search for "Cambridge bakeries" and got this picture – what would my great grandad make of this?] *I ran out of bread last week and dug in the freezer – to find a loaf of Olive bread my daughter had bought. What would great grandad make of that?* I never met him, I just have memories of my great granny, going with granny to visit her in a nursing home – which must be over half a century ago.



“I am the bread of life.” Of course Jesus is the most exciting, special, amazing bread we can have – but, what is much, much more important than that, is that Jesus gave the crowd ordinary fish, ordinary bread – and he fed the crowd because they were hungry. They had need of him, and he gave them what they required. They needed healing – he healed them; they believed they were God’s people – he talked to them of God; they needed a Messiah – someone who proved that God was still with them and would drive their oppressors out. They went out to hear Jesus, and would believe in Him – until they realised his Kingdom was not of this world, that his Kingdom meant putting others first, that joining his Kingdom might not be an easy option. Then many turned away.



Over the thousand years of the life of our churches, people will have been here for many different reasons. When life was short and death an ever present feature, you would be far more likely to follow the Lord who holds you in life and death. When Society believed in hell, you would have to be a very determined person to turn your back on the place and the Lord who will save you from everlasting damnation. When the church was the social service that would ensure you got bread when you were hungry, when the church was the place of education, when the church at the centre of this village – it was a different world.

Now it is perfectly possible to live without ever entering a church. There is no need for baptism – Society can find other ways to mark the arrival of a child. So

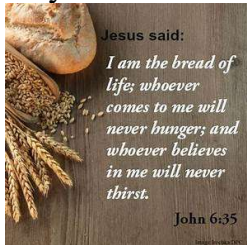
many places offer weddings, if that is what you want – less than a quarter of weddings are religious.



Watching afternoon TV it is depressing to see all those adverts which say “I don’t like going to funerals, that’s why I’m not going to mine” – is it any wonder that, although there weeks when I can be busy with funerals, there can also be months when I have none? In my depressed moments, I wonder why we bother.



Then I join the children at the family activities at St Nicks on Thursday, or lead the celebration of Pam’s life on Friday, or I sit with wedding couples and plan their special day, or I meet with my friends on Sunday – and I know exactly why faith is so important.



Jesus says “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”. Society may no longer worry that people are hungry, that people are dying because support is no longer there, etc. etc., but there are people who care.

I am very glad that religious people – and not just Christians, I hasten to add – we are the people who are feeding the hungry. Thousands of children will be fed this summer holiday by church playschemes and luncheon clubs. Many of the food banks which are now necessary across our land are being staffed and supplied by Christians. Of course, many people who are not regular church-goers are also making Society better – and thank God for them – but I do believe that faith should be something that makes life better.

“Then the Jews began to complain” says our Gospel reading – and sometimes it is easiest for us to complain. Complaining, miserable religious people – well that does nothing to extend the Kingdom. We are drawn by God, God is a God of love, of compassion and of understanding. He is a God who calls us to worship, to follow, to serve, to enjoy. No, of course life is not always easy, of course we are touched by pain and suffering, of course we should be touched by the suffering of those around us – we should be people who care. But we care, we endure, we commit because of the love of God.



We must commit ourselves to take the bread of life, to let this bread sustain us. That in itself is a challenge – it is all too easy for worship to become an optional extra, of something that only happens when we’ve nothing else on that Sunday. It is all too easy for prayer, for listening to God, communicating with God – all too easy for that to be the thing pushed out of our busy lives. We believe Scripture is the Word of God, but it takes time and effort to read, learn and inwardly digest – yes, we’ll push that out too. Life is harder as we get older, we can’t do everything we once did – but we mustn’t let that be an excuse to step back from the faithful service of our God, his church, and his world. Covid may have changed how we live our faith, but it must not be allowed to change our faith. Faith is always something that we could do better – but serving faithful church people is a vital part of who we are, and we – all of us – need to be faithful, worshipping, loving people of God.

When faith matters to us, when we believe and celebrate our faith – then we are best able to be a church that reaches out, that welcomes in, that accepts people as they are, and let’s the power of God bless and transform us all. I think the Book of Common Prayer puts it beautifully, in the post-communion prayer
NEW SLIDE

“we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son”



Not only do we receive the bread, do we receive the body of Christ – we are the body of Christ, God’s food for the world. I am one of the heirs of Jack Cable the baker – a great grandad I never knew – I hope he’s proud of me, as I am proud of him. God’s love is eternal, from one generation to another. Amen.