

## St. Brandon's

4 August 2024

*Psalm 78:23-29*

*Ephesians 4: 1-16; John 6: 24-35*

**Jesus, Bread of heaven, feed us now through your living word we pray.  
Amen.**

I begin with an Olympics related question, of course...

Q: What could stretch for 6 km through the streets of Parish?

A: The baguettes baked in the Olympic village's boulangerie - 800 of them every day. Sounds like all night baking, I think!

- How many of us have eaten bread already today?
- How many of us agree that there are few things better than warm, fresh bread straight from the oven?

Of course, bread is a staple food the world over, such that the word *bread* stands for food in general, as in the Lord's Prayer. Bread eaten across the world is as different as the people and places where it's made... from baguettes to pitas, bagels to chapattis, or sourdough to a white sliced loaf!

Bread is basic to our everyday lives, yet also has variety and distinctive features in different cultures... And, without a doubt, it's best eaten fresh every day!

So today, with all that in mind, we consider **Jesus the Bread of Life**.

This is the second of five weeks when we leave Mark's gospel and move to John. We are reading through John chapter 6 one of the richest (and longest) in all the gospels, with the theme of **bread** running right through it.

John's gospel is full of symbolism, every event, saying and miracle pointing to a greater meaning behind it. Jesus, the Word made flesh, is gradually revealed to his followers and the world and as part of the revelation, John includes the seven 'I am' sayings of Jesus, of which this is the first.

Those two words 'I am' would never have been spoken by a first century Jew, since they stood for the name of God himself, so in using this phrase Jesus immediately claims that he is divine: God incarnate, or, as a child once put it so well, 'God with skin on!'

*I am the bread of Life, says Jesus, 'Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'*

In last week's gospel reading from John ch. 6, Jesus performed a miracle with bread - multiplying five small loaves to feed over 5,000 people, with some tasty fish thrown in. This is a powerful picture of the love and grace of God given for everyone - as well as being a great way to feed a ravenous crowd! Which is why they have followed him round the lake, hoping for another free meal.

But they're also mystified that Jesus has crossed the lake after his disciples and without a boat - *'Rabbi, when did you come here?'* they quiz him. The answer is, he walked across the water. But the crowd can't understand this, yet...

Jesus knows all that is in their minds when he speaks to them.

**He wants to move them from considering only their physical needs to their spiritual ones, and from being impressed by miracles to recognising who he is, and believing in him.**

The same progression may apply to us: we begin with practical needs... so, I'm thrilled to see the **Food Bank** at the back of church filling up steadily: thank you for offering that practical help to local families this summer...

Maybe few of us here are physically hungry, but we may be hungry for company, encouragement, friendship or support. At other times we may have very real practical needs - a lift to a hospital appointment, help with shopping, someone to mend a leaking tap. To help others like this is good, and crucial to our life as a church and our outreach to our community.

*But*, God is offering us so much more as well, and if we never look beyond the physical, we never discover the *true bread from heaven* of which Jesus speaks.

Maybe we're like the crowd who watched from a distance, but wouldn't dream of joining Jesus as his disciples. We may witness wonderful answers to prayer or miraculous healings, see people's lives changed or strange coincidences which are making us think that God is real, and yet we never move beyond that stage... We keep God at arm's length, view him as a universal Santa or benign magician, but not part of our real lives, not the God who revealed himself to us in the person and life of Jesus, whose love took him to the cross on our behalf.

God wants us to move from being impressed by miracles to seeing who he truly is, and believing in him.

In this service, and in all our Communion services, we have been given a way to make that move, to come forward, in faith. And so, at Communion, when we 'draw near with faith' to receive the bread and wine, we can step beyond the physical to receive the

spiritual nourishment which God offers us, as we 'feed on him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving'.

We each need to respond and participate - to come to Christ, and to believe.

So it may be that even today, at Communion, you do this in truth and faith at a new level, and leave here knowing that you have received the bread of life which truly satisfies.

I'd like to suggest that, regardless of whether you usually take the bread or have been confirmed in the church, if you want to make this response you come and receive the bread today.

It can be really hard to do this, as George Herbert wrote:

'Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin...'

But is the mercy and love of Jesus, who gave himself to be the bread of Life, which draws us out from imprisonment in our physical need, and perhaps our guilt and shame, to admit our need of Him, of his forgiveness and love, above everything else in our lives.

The wonderful paradox of Jesus being the bread of life is that he gives us life forever- and afresh each day.

We can be sure as Christians of the amazing gift of eternal life. But also, like the physical bread which is best eaten fresh, we need our 'daily bread'- fresh food for each day as we feed on him spiritually in prayer and worship.

We receive Christ, the true bread from heaven, both through the sacrament of Communion and as we invite him to be present to us in our lives day by day, through the Holy Spirit, for example as we meet other people, as we offer him thanksgiving and praise, and as we read the Bible and pray.

Today's psalm and gospel both reminded us that God fed his people manna - heavenly food, in the desert - fresh every day, and as much as they wanted - just like the crowd last week had plenty and were satisfied.

But in the desert, God told them to take enough for each day but no more, or it would go bad, so his people needed to rely on him, every day. Jesus is our living bread now - today, whatever our needs may be, and evermore - what a promise! As we feed on him together, we will also be knit together as his body, built up in his love, as we hear in today's reading from Ephesians. So I leave you with two questions.

**Are you hungry for the true bread?**

And do you echo the words of the crowd who said to Jesus, '**Give us this bread always**'?

Jesus said *I am the bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* May it be so for us, every day. Amen