

## A Reflection from Revd Ali for Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021 ~ Trinity 9

Our Gospel reading (John 6: 24 – 35) feels a bit like *Deja vu* this week. At the start of the reading, the crowds have yet again followed and found Jesus and his disciples. Last week, we heard how Jesus walked on water across half of the lake, then miraculously transported the disciples' boat across the remaining water to Capernaum. So, once again the people follow them around the lake, seeking and searching Jesus out. The people looking for something that they can't find anywhere else. At the beginning of chapter 6 John told us the story of the feeding of the 5000, but this time there is no miracle physical feeding. Instead Jesus says in verse 26, "I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles."

The crowds had come to Jesus. Jesus had fed them with physical and spiritual food, but Jesus questions whether the people only understood the satisfaction of their physical hunger. Jesus is pointing them to something deeper which they have a hard time understanding. This time, Jesus doesn't pull any punches. He says, 'you are not here because of who I am and because you understand the meaning of the miracles which show who I am'. Instead, he asks 'are you here because you want spiritual bread or do you just want the miracle, the spectacle?'. Then he starts talking about being the bread of life... and now it is getting complicated, so the crowds start asking questions.

The crowd replied, "What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Have the crowd seen or heard about Jesus' miracles and are just following him for more sensation? Is Jesus just some sort of entertainment or they are testing him? Whatever their motivation, they are demanding more miracles for their own benefit or entertainment. Jesus replies "I am telling you the truth". "What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the *real* bread from heaven. For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Jesus was explaining that 'no, it wasn't Moses who gave your ancestors the bread from heaven. The real bread from heaven is from God and what God is giving you *now* is no ordinary bread either, it doesn't just satisfy a temporary hunger, it is the bread of life.' Jesus himself, **is** the bread of life.

And then Jesus tells them as it is. 'Well I tell you I am the bread' Jesus says boldly. "I AM the bread of life." With this phrase Jesus identifies himself with God, with Yahweh, the great I AM. By doing so, Jesus identifies Yahweh as one who provides the bread of life for the world. "For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Jesus' statement is in stark contrast to the bread which feeds but does not satisfy. Jesus challenges the people - are they really looking for something physical or spectacular or are they looking for something more, something intangible, something that will change their lives forever?

The people question how? How is Jesus the bread of life? How does Jesus satisfy hunger and thirst? How does Jesus provide life for the world? Difficult questions, which remind me of something I once read which said that: 'Whenever we find something difficult to get our heads around – whether it's doctrinal disputes, church politics, our own uncertainties as to exactly what we do and don't believe or indeed the lectionary passages on which I'm supposed to be preaching, just remember - it's all about Jesus. Look at him, take a deep breath, and think, 'Oh, yes, right....' it's all about him'. Jesus was telling them and us that it was *not* about having a belly full of food, it was not about miracles. It is about who Jesus really is.

Jesus is the bread of life, not for what he puts into our stomachs, but rather for how he teaches us to live, really LIVE. He came to earth to give us life, and life in all its fullness. A life with and for

God. A life that transforms us and transforms our communities through us. By instigating and asking us to remember him in the actions of sharing Communion, Jesus is inviting us to share in his life, death and resurrection. Jesus preparing us to give ourselves in the same way as he gave himself. The invitation for us all is to dare to follow his radical way find life in a different way. To find purpose and meaning beyond the ordinary, day to day existence. The hunger that Jesus satisfies is for purpose and meaning beyond ourselves. But once we see and understand Jesus as the bread of life, it gives us other hungers too. Hungers for peace, for justice, loving kindness, and a humble walk with our God.

No matter how often we feast at God's table, these hungers never leave us. That is why we take Communion regularly. In the act of receiving Communion, we are offering ourselves into the service of the one who gives himself as food for us. By receiving the body of Christ we allow our lives to be reshaped by Christ into his own body for the world. By accepting the gift and challenge of receiving Communion we become bread like his bread. All of this, not by getting something, but by giving, giving everything as Christ has given to us. Come to his table hungry for life, leave it hungry to give life. Full of Jesus, the bread of life.

We sometimes say at the end of the service 'we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of our lord Jesus Christ – send us out in the power of his spirit to live and work to his praise and glory'. Jesus tells us, that when we have eaten of the bread of life we are to take him out with us to satisfy those other hungers in the world. To share with everyone we meet the true bread, the bread of life who feeds us so we will never go hungry.

Amen