

**John 6: 25-35 *Just Believe!* – Sermon for Christ Church, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021, by Rev Lin Vawer**

We are starting a little differently today. Inside my bags and boxes there are things that I really like, so just have a think about what you know about me and what might be in the box! A little reminder – I like watching TV, tea and cake, a nice coffee, an occasional Gin and tonic, my favourite shop is Clarks, I love Haribos – so what's in the box? You can ask me a question but I'm only answering yes or no! any ideas.

*[ANSWER: A LOAF OF BREAD]*

It's good to ask questions, to be curious, to want to know but it's also good to have answers. You have found out something else about me today – I quite like bread – and it links quite nicely with our reading, the bread of life. The crowd have followed Jesus, there is an eagerness to engage again with the miracle worker, they want Jesus to produce more food but Jesus says that he offers something better – himself. He is the bread of life that will never leave them hungry. Yes, I quite like bread but actually I love the bread of life that is Jesus.

**Let's pray: We come with our curiosity and questions. We come looking for answers.**

**We are grateful for our daily bread but we long for the bread of eternal life.**

**let us seek to be fed and filled with God's life and love. Amen**

Bread is an age-old staple. Its smell speaks of homecoming, belonging, sustenance, warmth. Apparently, the smell of newly baked bread and fresh coffee sells houses – top tip. There is nothing quite like breaking open a loaf of freshly baked bread – crusty on the outside, soft and warm on the inside. No wonder bread week is always a favourite on Bake Off!

With God it is always bread week.

The Gospel reading takes place just after Jesus has fed about five thousand people with just five barley loaves and two fish. Can you imagine it? A huge crowd have been given all they need to satisfy their hunger. They are stuffed. No wonder they come looking for him the next day! They are clearly eager for another encounter with this amazing man, who provided the miraculous picnic. Questions are asked but perhaps they were not prepared for Jesus response as he opens up an intriguing discussion about bread, comparing this everyday necessity to Himself as the source of all life. Jesus understands their motive. They are perhaps interested in another free lunch, less focussed on what that feeding might mean. Their focus is material and physical, very similar to their ancestors in the wilderness.

Only two weeks after being freed from captivity, the Israelites are in distress. They are hungry. They moan and complain "at least there was bread in Egypt. We're going to starve out here. it wasn't so bad in Egypt. I blame Moses". But do you know if I'm, honest I can hear my own voice with them. We like to think that they should have trusted God more based on the signs they'd witnessed – the plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea. But the truth is that humans very easily forget. How many of us have experienced Gods loving kindness in so many ways, yet when the chips are down, we forget every single thing.

They needn't have worried. God provided their fill of bread every morning in the form of the manna they find on the ground. It becomes a story handed down, a story to remind the hearers of Gods loving kindness. It becomes a symbol of Gods provision and wisdom. They ate and were filled – just like those whom Jesus fed. God fed and protected them, but he also required them to be obedient and faithful. It was two-way deal. And it's the same two-way deal with Jesus.

With God it is always bread week.

Questions, questions, questions – Jesus takes the image of bread and does something remarkable with it to answer the questions. He applies it to himself "***I am the bread of life.***". it is interesting that he was born in Bethlehem, which literally means "the house of bread".

what must we do - Work for "**food that endures to eternal life**

what's the work - belief. **believe in the one he has sent.**"

Belief that is not passive assent but active work.

Our instinct is that before we are willing to do the work God wants, we need to ask questions. But perhaps God just needs us to make the first move, to step forward, not knowing where we are going but trusting him to guide our next step, to know where our next meal is coming from. As we do the work of God by believing in the one whom he has sent, our lives will reflect the quality of the Living Bread we have shared. It is still a two-way deal - we respond to what we have received by sharing it.

Belief that says "*You are my bread. You are my homecoming, my belonging, my sustenance, and my warmth. You are my fill and my comfort. You are all these things in the world. With you it is always bread week*"

This belief is not a one off. It is active continuous work. So easily we forget. So easily we are seduced by the things that are not bread. Often things we have done or not done prevent us from eating the bread of life. Sometimes the way we see the world, each other or ourselves convince us that there is no other bread, and we should just settle for the same old manna. Sometimes our history, fears, anxieties, guilt, regrets, pain deceive us into believing that we are not even hungry.

But it doesn't have to be like that. The table of God is set and there is a place for each one of us. We are not destined to eat manna for the rest of our lives. The living bread has come down from heaven to feed each one of us. And Every moment of every day God invites us to eat new bread, to step out of the old way and into a new way of living and being.

When we come to communion we are sustained by the physical elements – to see bread taken, blessed, broken, and given, to hear again "this is my body given for you", to remember again that Jesus the bread of life, gave himself to restore us to Gods loving embrace, we come with open hands to receive.

But it's not just about physically taking the bread. Every day we repeat it again and again as we come with empty hands to receive the provision of Gods spiritual bread. In tight spots we cry out, aware that we need God's resourcing. God is always ready to press into our hands exactly what we need.

Today let's renew our trust in God, the bread of life. Let us tell him of our hunger and our need. Let's whisper our deepest longings for homecoming and belonging, comfort and warmth, and to talk to God about our worries and concerns for those around us. Let us hold out our hands and ask them to be filled with all the resources we need to put our faith into action.

And let us be confident that when we seek God's bread, we will be satisfied.

With God it is always bread week.

Let's us pray

**Lord God, giver of life,**

**You bless us with all we need –**

**And with so much more.**

**Keep us from being so focussed on our physical needs**

**That we neglect our spiritual food.**

**Feed us with your word,**

**Satisfy us with your presence,**

**and strengthen us by your spirit –**

**that we may share your eternal life. Amen**