

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 1st August 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

I come with my curiosity and questions.
I come seeking answers.
I am grateful for my daily bread,
but I yearn for the bread of eternal life.
I want to be fed and filled with God's life and love.

Hymn – MP 790:

You are the King of glory,
You are the Prince of peace,
You are the Lord of heaven and earth,
You're the Son of righteousness.
Angels bow down before You
worship and adore,
for You have the words of eternal life,
You are Jesus Christ the Lord
Hosanna to the Son of David!
Hosanna to the King of Kings!
Glory to God in the highest heaven,
for Jesus the Messiah reigns!

Mavis Ford © 1978 Authentic Publishing CCLI Song No. 114452

Approaching God in Prayer

Christ the living God, I adore you and bless you,
because you give us the essentials in life.

But most of all you give us yourself, the living bread.
Help me to be slow to complain and quick to share.
And lead me further into you, my Friend, my Teacher and my Saviour.

Lord, give me eyes to see – to really see;
a heart that believes – really believes;
a mind that understands – really understands;
and a life that proclaims you as the living bread
to all who are in any kind of need.

Forgive me – forgive us Lord, when we use people
and value them only for what they can give us,
not for who they really are.

Help me to see you, Lord,
not only as my Saviour but as my role model,
so that we might be generous in our giving
and obedient in your service.

I ask this in your name.

And as I prepare myself to read words of Scripture, Lord,
I pray that you will draw me into a deeper understanding
of all that John's Gospel has to offer.

Give me clarity of thought, openness of heart
and eagerness of Spirit to receive all it has to say to us
and to share it with others.

Amen

Gospel Reading – John 6: 24 – 35

²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' ²⁶ Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.'

²⁸ Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' ²⁹ Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' ³⁰ So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?' ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

³² Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' ³⁴ They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'



³⁵ Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

Hymn – Congregational Praise 230: *George Rawson (1807-89)*

We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind,
to notions of our day and sect, crude, partial and confined:
no, let a new and better hope within our hearts be stirred:
the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.

Our faithful forebears searching went the first steps of the way;
this was the dawning, yet to grow into this perfect day.
And grow it shall, our glorious sun will brighter rays afford:
the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.

O Father, Son, and Spirit, send us increase from above;
enlarge, expand all living souls to comprehend your love;
and make us all go on to know, with nobler powers conferred,
that you have yet more light and truth to break forth from your word.

Reflections

So, the prequel to this story is the very public feeding of the 5,000 strong crowd (followed by the less public walking on water).

Why had a crowd gathered? Like going to see a music concert of any kind, you want an encore! And this crowd wanted more! More of Jesus' miraculous provision to meet their basic needs.

But Jesus wanted to feed them with more than just the basics, Jesus had a better version of 'more'. What Jesus did on the *other* side of the lake only fed their bellies – Jesus said what they should be seeking is a rather more wholesome substance altogether, a *spiritual* food that will nourish them and give them a taste of the kingdom.

'Eternal life' (literally, 'the life of the ages') is John's repeatedly used term for the 'kingdom of God' - the term that the other Gospel writes use. It emphasises quality, rather than quantity: the life of God and God's reign rather than the life of this earth and its rulers.

The crowd respond by wanting to know what they must do, to perform the works of God. Jesus says that the work we are called on to do is simply to believe.

Yet, this crowd who ate a banquet from a single packed lunch and followed Jesus across the lake because of that banquet, ask him for a another sign? They've seen Jesus perform a wondrous work and yet they ask what work he will do by way of proof (as though they didn't have proof enough) and they tell him that they know a story of something similar that happened to other people, namely their ancestors eating manna in the wilderness.

It is Jesus who brings Moses into the conversation – probably to compare and contrast him and the great leader who freed the people from slavery and led them through the wilderness. He does so by pointing out that Moses didn't actually do anything – God did. More than that, God was doing it again, here and now, giving bread from heaven as he did after the exodus. And the crowd want that bread.

But Jesus says, it's me! This is one of the seven so-called 'I am' sayings: and there were those who said how very dare he describe himself as the bread of life – the bread that has come down from heaven.

The matter of Jesus describing himself as the bread of life will ultimately lead to a difficult conversation which will cause many to turn away from following him – it turns out that he's not going to be a magician pulling food out of a hat at every end and turn after all!

Eventually, you will read that about Jesus asking the 12 if they also want to leave Peter utters the truth – “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life”.

And how do we share Jesus' words of eternal life – a good place to start is sharing bread. For those without it, bread is very important.

What are we to offer? Are the 'good works' of the church unconditional? Do we 'share bread' with too much or too little spiritual engagement?

A study on food provision by faith groups found that the work of food bank volunteers was seen as 'true Christianity in operation'; that cooking and eating together was about much more than food; and that even the gift of simple refreshments could give a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven. There is more to feeding the hungry than giving bread – but it might be a good place to start.

During lockdown, a keen west-country gardener wanted to help those who could do no more than get out for their daily walk. She operated a bring-and-buy stall at the roadside outside her house, which encouraged many people to take healthy exercise gardening in their own gardens while raising thousands for local cancer charities. The socially distanced conversations about plants also fed the souls of those who were lonely. There is more to being fed than eating bread.

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 that we share. It's a two-way deal as we respond to what we have received by sharing it.

Hymn – R&S 538:

George Herbert (1593-1633) altd.

Teach me, my God and King, in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything to do it as for thee.

A man that looks on glass on it may stay his eye;
or if he pleaseth, through it pass, and then the heaven espy.

All may of thee partake: nothing can be so mean,
which, with this tincture, 'For thy sake', will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws, makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone that turneth all to gold:
for that which God doth touch and own cannot for less be told.

Holding the World in Prayer

Lord Jesus, the crowd came to hear good news.

They came expecting to be fed.

I pray for those in our world who wait expectantly to be fed.

I pray for those who hunger for words that will feed their spirits,
words that will change the situations that they live in.

I pray for wisdom and integrity for politicians, administrators,
and those in power, that they might work creatively on schemes that
share the bread of your creation.

I pray that we will be generous in using all the resources we have
to feed the world, to share and support one another,
because we are all part of your family Lord.

The crowd came, as many still come.

So, gracious God I pray for those agencies whose work supports
those in need.

I pray for those who find it hard to believe - that their lives can change;

those who feel they will never have enough money to live on;

those who feel they will never find work;

those who despair that there will ever be peace in their country;

those who despair that they will ever be well;

those who have given up believing that they can be forgiven;

those who struggle to go on believing in themselves;

those who struggle to go on believing in you.

Lord, be their strength, be their assurance and be their hope.

The crowd sat and were fed – but not as they expected.

Lord may we all be fed and nourished by your living bread,
food for our souls.

Lord Jesus, the disciples sat with you and asked you to teach them to pray and he gave them this bread of life –
words we say today and now; throughout the world and here:-
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.....

Hymn – R&S 345: MP 201: William Williams, Pantycelyn (1717-91)

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty, hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through:
strong deliver, strong deliver, be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

Closing Words and Blessing

As we seek to do what you want, Lord,
may we bring bread to the hungry – food for bodies and food for souls,
strength for the journey, and hope for the future.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore
Amen

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