

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 8th August 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

Jesus says,
with me you will find a welcome
and the peace you crave.
With me you will find the assurance you long for
and food from heaven.
With me you will find the cup of salvation.
Jesus says, come to me to find the challenge of eternal living.
So, Lord Jesus, I come. Amen.

Although we meet in different places and spaces – together, yet apart –
we are gathered in spirit, as this hymn reminds us

Hymn – R&S 469: MP 38:

As we are gathered, Jesus is here;
one with each other, Jesus is here;
joined by the Spirit, built up in love,
part of the body, the Church of God.
As we are gathered, Jesus is here,
one with each other, Jesus is here.

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A Prayerful interpretation of Psalm 34 make the words your own

I feel as if I could never cease praising God.
Come and rejoice with me over His goodness!

I reached for God out of my inner conflicts, and he was there to give me strength and courage.

I wept in utter frustration over my troubles, and He was near to help and support me.

What He has done for me He can do for you!

Turn to Him; He will not turn away from you.

God's loving presence encompasses those who look to Him
He is with them in the midst of their troubles and conflicts.
He meets their emptiness with His abundance and strengthens their weakness through His divine power.

Listen to me; I know what I am speaking about.

I have learned through experience that this is the way to happiness.

God is ever alert to the cries of His children;

He feels and bears with them their pains and problems.

He is near to those who suffer and reaches out to help those who are beaten down by despair.

Even the children of God experience affliction,
but they have a loving Father who will keep them
and watch over them

Those who do not know God suffer in loneliness, without hope;

Those who know and serve God find meaning and purpose

Even in the midst of suffering and conflict

A Reflection on Psalm 34 from Psalms/Now by Leslie F. Brandt. altd by JA

Approaching God in Prayer

I come to you, Lord Jesus,

for the hunger of my longing to be filled;

for my thirst for truth to be quenched;

for my relationship with you to be deepened;

for my life to be blessed by your living presence.

I come to you, Lord Jesus, in gratitude.

I praise you, Lord Jesus,

because you are far more than I think you are

and you call me to be far more than I dare believe that I can be.

So, as I reflect on your words, and inspired by your life,

draw me deeper into a living relationship

with God - your Father and mine,

who, in you, expressed his love for all creation fully and utterly.

Give me clarity of thought, openness of heart

and eagerness of Spirit to receive all that your word has to say to me

and the courage to share it with others.

Amen

Gospel Reading - John 6: 35, 41 - 51

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.

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' ⁴² They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' ⁴³ Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down

from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

New Testament Reading - Ephesians 4: 25 - 5: 2

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³² and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

5 ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Hymn - R&S 512: MP 590

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you; allelu, alleluia:

Alleluia
alleluia, alleluia,
allelu, alleluia!

Ask, and it shall be given unto you, seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened unto you; allelu, alleluia:

Alleluia....

We shall not live by bread alone, but by ev'ry word
that proceeds from the mouth of God allelu, alleluia:

Alleluia....

Karen Lafferty (1948-) alt. Copyright © Maranatha! Music USA, Word Music (UK)

Reflections

This weeks Gospel reading begins by refreshing our memory - repeating the last verse from last week's reading (should you have forgotten it!) 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

If you have some bread, take a piece and think about what's gone into making it what it is. Bread has ingredients.

The ingredients of bread are found in many recipes. They are useful and have their purpose within different foods that we eat and enjoy.

To make bread, the separate ingredients, in just the right quantities and combination are blended together; kneaded and left to rise and mature; then moulded and shaped by the maker.

But bread is only useful once it's been subjected to the heat of an oven – tested and changed.

The religious leaders (described simply as Jews by John) thought they knew about Jesus! But he was more than the ingredients of his mother and father and the town in which he grew up. Jesus described himself as the 'bread of life'. He had specific qualities that made him who he was, 'ingredients' found in the image and nature of God who moulded, shaped and perfected a human form from God's very self – Jesus, God's Son, the bread of life - more than the sum of the 'obvious' human ingredients.

But the ingredients that made Jesus are the ingredients we need in order to be able to imitate Jesus - above and beyond genetics. We are made in the image of God and we all possess something of the qualities, the 'ingredients' that made up Jesus.

Following and imitating Jesus (our example) closely, putting oneself into his hands and presence as much as we can, asking him to mould us and shape in us a Christ-like character will enable us to demonstrate that quality of life that is able to discern what is truly good and bring heaven to earth. Here we create the kingdom of God on earth, as a foretaste of the quality of eternal life that Jesus says can be ours if we believe in him. He wants our lives to be nourished by the ingredients that make Jesus who he is – bread to nourish the world.

Now, the passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians contrasts two ways of living and reminds us that whatever our desires, for physical food or spiritual sustenance, there are certain demands which God makes on us when we claim to be made in the mould created by Jesus. Those new Christians in Ephesus were to behave differently from those around them. Their joy was to be found in being filled with the Spirit as they participated in the life of Christ. These are the conditions of a life in community – then and now - the ingredients that are pleasing to God: truth, honesty, honest work, true conversation, kindness, tender-heartedness, love. These resonate with the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (*Galatians 5: 22 – 23*)

Like the early Christians in Ephesus, in all we do we are to imitate God as God is made known to us in Jesus – we are to be bread for the world, scattered in our communities as living witnesses and imitators of Christ. It is what we do with the ingredients that made up Jesus and therefore make up the Christian life that matters. Bread goes stale unless it is used - and nobody likes stale bread. Likewise, the 'bread' we offer to the world, made from the ingredients God has given us to

shape and form us, will be stale and useless in our communities unless we are used. So, in order *not* to become 'stale' we must allow ourselves to be blended and moulded again and again in God's shaping and skilful hands, made useful as we are subjected to the heat of life a lived 'differently' – tested and changed as we imitate Christ, a controversial character, a fly in the ointment of the leaders and rulers, an unwanted ingredient, who was himself tested and changed by the heat of friction through opposition.

Imitating God, as children imitate a parent, is closely related to the thought throughout John's Gospel. Believers are children of God and as such they – we – are to love one another, as Christ has loved them.

Amen

Hymn – R&S 199: MP 384:

Jesus the Lord says, 'I am the bread,
the bread of life for the world am I.
The bread of life for the world am I,
the bread of life for the world am I'.
Jesus the Lord says, 'I am the bread,
the bread of life for the world am I'.



Jesus the Lord says, 'I am the vine,
the true and fruitful vine am I.
The true and fruitful vine am I,
the true and fruitful vine am I.'
Jesus the Lord says 'I am the vine
The true and fruitful vine am I'.

Jesus the Lord says: 'I am the way,
the true and living way am I.
The true and living way am I,
the true and living way am I.'

Jesus the Lord says: 'I am the way,
the true and living way am I'.

Jesus the Lord says: 'I am the light,
the one true light of the world am I.
The one true light of the world am I,
the one true light of the world am I.'
Jesus the Lord says: 'I am the light,
the one true light of the world am I'.

Jesus the Lord says: 'I am the shepherd,
the one good shepherd of the sheep am I.
The one good shepherd of the sheep am I,
the one good shepherd of the sheep am I.'
Jesus the Lord says: 'I am the shepherd,
the one good shepherd of the sheep am I'.

Jesus the Lord says: 'I am the life,
the resurrection and the life am I.
The resurrection and the life am I,
the resurrection and the life am I.'
Jesus the Lord says: 'I am the life,
the resurrection and the life am I'.

vv. 1, 3—5: Anon. tr. from Urdu C. D Monahan (1906-57) altd.
v. 2: compilers © Methodist Church Division of Education & Youth*

A Prayer of Confession

In the silence, I confess my wrongdoing,
asking your forgiveness, loving God.
For those times when I have been:
less than honest...
untrustworthy and unreliable...
unkind and malicious...
when I have aggrieved your Holy Spirit
and been less than the person you created me to be.

Take from me my bitterness and anger,
my vulnerability and hurt,
and forgive me as I in turn forgive those who have wronged me.
'Be kind to one another, tender-hearted,
forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.
Live in love, as Christ has loved you.'
Amen

The Lord's Prayer and Prayers for the World

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen

Lord God, as I look outside my walls at the world you created
give us *all* sufficient, only, for the day;
enough to satisfy our need, not our greed.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Put our discipleship to the test:
enough that we will withstand the challenge,
not so much as to overwhelm us.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Grant us the desire to do your will:
the way of self-sacrifice, not self-serving.
the strength and wisdom to love those you have given to my care
Give us this day our daily bread.
So that your kingdom will come on earth
as it exists to your glory and praise in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Lord, God, feed and nourish us by your living bread,
food for our souls. Amen.

Hymn - R&S 530:

Living God, your joyful Spirit breaks the bounds of time and space,
rests in love upon your people, drawn together in this place.

Here we join in glad thanksgiving, here rejoice to pray and praise:
Lord of all our past traditions, Lord of all our future days.

As your bread may we be broken, scattered in community;
we who know your greatest blessings called to share Christ's ministry.
May we gently lead each other, share our hunger and our thirst;
learn that only through our weakness
shall we know the strength of Christ.

Lord, when we grow tired of giving, feel frustration, hurt and strain,
by your Spirit's quiet compulsion, draw us back to you again.
Guide us through the bitter searching when our confidence is lost;
give us hope from desolation, arms outstretched upon a cross.

Living God, your power surrounds us, as we face the way Christ trod,
challenge us to fresh commitment to the purposes of God:
called to share a new creation, called to preach a living word,
promised all the joys of heaven, through the grace of Christ our Lord.

Jill Jenkins (1937-)

Closing Words and Blessing

As ingredients, mixed and kneaded together;
as dough, left to rise and mature;
as a loaf tested in heat and flame;
as bread, blessed, broken and shared –
we are the body of Christ, the bread of life, given for the world.

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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