

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 15th August 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

O taste!
O taste and see!
O taste and see how gracious the Lord is!
Happy are those who put their trust in him.

Hymn – R&S 114: MP 404:

Let all the world in every corner sing 'My God and King!'
The heavens are not too high,
his praise may thither fly:
the earth is not too low,
his praises there may grow.

Let all the world in every corner sing 'My God and King!'
The Church with psalms must shout,
no door can keep them out:
but, above all, the heart
must bear the longest part.

Let all the world in every corner sing 'My God and King!'

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Approaching God in Prayer with Thanks and Humility

God of all, I bring the good things that have happened this week
to this time of worship;
the upsetting things, the shocking things, the sad things.
Help me to find peace in my circumstances;
trust that you share in my pain;

and knowledge of my need to be filled by your Spirit -
moment by moment and day by day.

I give thanks to you, constant God,
in the fast-changing world of beauty and pain.
For your company when I've struggled to cope,
your clarity, when life has become muddled and confused.

For your understanding when I made mistakes,
your readiness to forgive when I'm ready to come home.

For your generous gift of life in all its complexity,
your wonderful creativity and offer of hope.

For your power to change and make a difference,
your graceful invitation to share in your work
of redemption and healing.

For your love, so freely given,
your acceptance and welcome to each and every one of us -
just as we are.

Generous God, you provide enough and more for *all* your children.
Yet we are selfish with your generosity,
often unwilling to share with others what is also rightly theirs.
Forgive us for our poverty of spirit,
our meanness and our greed.
Give us the wisdom to use your gifts wisely
so that all may have a share in your overflowing goodness.

Provider God, of food for our souls as well as our bodies,
may we so consume you
that, as carriers of your love,
we may be the source of nourishment and energy
to those who can only dream of feasting.

Give us today our daily bread we pray – the gift of dailiness:

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

Gospel Reading – John 6: 51 - 58

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.'

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵ for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.'

Reflections

You may feel as though you have eaten an elegant sufficiency of bread in worship these last few weeks – but here is more!

And again, we start with the last verse of last week's reading, perhaps to remind us in case we'd forgotten, but more likely really to remind us that we are in the middle of a story – in the middle of a conversation really. And this is a very important conversation indeed, pivotal even.

Jesus is still comparing the story of Israel in the wilderness (where people ate the manna that God provided – just enough for that day) and himself.

But Jesus has started to sound rather 'distasteful' both to his Jewish audience at the time, as well as to us.

If you tell someone not to think about pink elephants, more than likely that's *all* they will be able to think about! Metaphorical or not, Jesus has created a lasting image of eating his flesh and it's hard to get that graphic imagery out of your mind – even when people tell you it's a metaphor.

What Jesus is doing is to create an association between the need for food every day and the need to nourish our lives on him every day – there is a dailiness about the need of food, without which we will die, and the need for Jesus.

Jesus is described by John in the first few verses of his Gospel as the word made flesh (John 1: 14). So, is the feasting we are to do a taking in of and feasting on Jesus' word... God's word?

God became flesh and blood to live among us, so that we can have the closest of encounters with God through what we know about God from and through Jesus.

In the Old Testament, there's a close connection between blood and life and also blood and sacrifice that those listening to Jesus would have understood full well.

The natural flow of blood around our body gives us life, distributing nutrients and renewing oxygen in every part to enable it to function. Jesus wants to be that close to us, part of our very being, supporting and empowering us.

We are used to the saving power of blood these days, because of the life-saving possibilities afforded to us through blood transfusion and organ donation – we are used to ‘giving’ in this way so that others might live.

By his death and resurrection Jesus makes us the offer of his life flowing within us, eternal life; life in his presence where we can feast on him for eternity.

We also understand in our modern world that many devices and gadgets need charging up. Electric vehicles can travel many miles, without noise or pollution. But eventually they need to return to their source of power, to be recharged so that the electricity can flow through it and make it useful again. What are we enabled to do when we are plugged into Jesus?

What is our relationship with Jesus like? How often do we – do you – feed on his word, drink in his life and plug into the source of his power?

Of course, there’ll be times when we’ll ‘snack’ elsewhere, but Jesus invites us to share with him something that is much more sustaining.

How is your appetite for Jesus? How do you nourish it – daily?

They say, don’t they, ‘you are what you eat!’ If so, I want to feast on Jesus until I am full to bursting – I need more than an elegant sufficiency! I should want to be obese on Jesus’ word and lifeblood – how about you? How about those yet to know about him? We have a job of sharing to do!

Amen

Hymn - R&S 344: MP 192

God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient Church's story; bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour.

Lo! the hosts of evil round us scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!
From the fears that long have bound us,
free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days.

Cure thy children's warring madness; bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore;
let the gift of thy salvation be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore.

H. E. Fosdick (1878-1969) altd.

Holding the World in Prayer

Lord God,
I know that life can be a struggle in so many ways,
so I pray for people who struggle with their lives;
for those for whom the chips are down
and everything feels like an uphill struggle.
I pray for those, near and far,
whose lives have been affected by tragedy – fire; flood and fighting.

I pray for lawmakers and peacekeepers,
as they try to make the world a better place;
for our police forces, as they deal with challenging situations....

I pray for the work of hospices,
as they seek to bring a good end to life;
For staff in hospitals - consultants to cleaners
engaged in the work of healing our bodies and minds;
for staff in care and nursing homes,
who have the responsibility of looking after people
who are no longer able to care well enough for themselves....

I pray for parents nurturing children;
for teachers who have worked through challenge and change
throughout these difficult months;
and for the church's role in the nurture
of the physically young and the spiritually young....

I pray for people living with addictions;
for organisations that work
to help them in their search for wholeness,
and restore their lives....

And I pray for myself,
that I will be able to make the most of my God-given time,
and that I will be able to live well and be thankful,
despite all that causes me to struggle.

I ask all my prayers in the name of the one who is the bread of life –
the source of nourishing for me. Amen

Hymn - R&S 521: MP 159

Charles Wesley (1707-88) altd.

Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue,
thee, only thee, resolved to know
in all I think or speak or do.

The task thy wisdom hath assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil!
In all my works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.

Thee may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes my inmost substance see,
and labour on at thy command,
and offer all my works to thee.

Give me to bear thine easy yoke,
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look,
and hasten to thy glorious day;

for thee delightfully employ
whate'er thy bounteous grace hath given,
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with thee to heaven.

Closing Words and Blessing

With the promise of eternal life give me love to share with 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

*Hymn words reproduced under the CCLI Licence numbers of the SPACE Group
of Churches: 181588 - Grove URC: 178113 - The URC Heckmondwike:
177949 - Longcauseway Church: 1236906 - Norristhorpe URC:
783508 - Ravensthorpe with Hopton URC*