

## Sermon for 5<sup>th</sup> July 2009, Bread of Life (11:00am Service)

When the preacher gets up some people think it's time to think about what they're having for lunch. I know, I've done it, but not when I'm preaching! Today I'm giving you permission to think about what you'd like for lunch. What's your favourite food?

I expect that's made you hungry, so I've got one of my favourites to share. We'll use half now, and the other half at our communion feast (*children share out bread*).

This is a bit like the feeding of the 5000, but not so many people, no fish and no miracle. Who remembers the story of Jesus feeding 5000 people? We heard it 2 weeks ago.

Now we have the next part of the story - the crowds were still following Jesus. Even though he'd fed them plenty of fish sandwiches they still wanted more. It wasn't food they were hungry for, but the things Jesus was telling them. They asked him for another miracle to prove that what he was saying was true. Jesus wanted to feed their deepest need, but they couldn't see beyond their bellies. I suspect they were a bit surprised when Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." As so often, Jesus used an everyday image to help the people understand what he meant. Bread was everyday food, the basics. Interestingly, Asian translations of the bible often have Jesus saying "I am the rice of life." Everyday stuff. Jesus was saying that eating ordinary food won't keep us from wanting more, just like having the ordinary things of life doesn't keep us from wanting more. And Jesus still tries to teach us day by day that he is the only one who can satisfy our needs. We look everyday for things that will give us life, make us feel good, and so often we fail to see that it's Jesus - he's the basic, everyday, life-giving food that we can't do without.

Some of the people listening were angry because Jesus seemed to be saying he was God - they started grumbling that he was nothing but a local tradesman. The Jews had grumbled about God before. Remember the stories about God rescuing the Jews from Egypt. They grumbled all the way as God led them through the desert to freedom. When they were thirsty God gave them water; when they were hungry God gave them meat and manna - like bread that came from the skies each night. But even though God gave them all they needed, they still grumbled.

Now they were grumbling again, so Jesus reminded them of Isaiah's old prophecy that God would teach them if they would only listen. His words about bread of life were to remind them of the rest of Isaiah's prophecy (ch 55): "Come to me all who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen to me, and eat what is good." Jesus wanted the people to understand that he was the one God had promised to send and that anyone who turns to Jesus will have everlasting life. Listen to his generosity - anyone who turns to him will be accepted.

The chapter in John's gospel is sometimes called the mini gospel because it tells us the good news – anyone can have everlasting life – and it tells us where to get it – from Jesus. It's John's constant theme. When Jesus says I am the bread of life, he's saying he is the only one who can satisfy our deepest need.

We might think we know our needs, but most of our needs are really wants, and we grumble, at least to ourselves, when we can't get what we want, whether it's things or our own way. But getting what we want often leaves us feeling empty and wanting the next thing, still trying to get fulfillment from work or constant activity or a new car or any number of other things.

But those things can never satisfy us because our need is the deep desire for God that we were created for - the need that can't be satisfied by anything other than God – it's a God-shaped hole in each of us. Only Jesus, the bread of life, can fill that need, because only he can bring us into relationship with God.

I want to end by telling you a story about children who were orphaned and abandoned during world war II. Many of them were rescued and sent to refugee camps but some were so frightened of being abandoned again that they couldn't sleep at night. Then someone had the idea of giving them a piece of bread to take to bed with them. Holding their bread the children could sleep because the bread reminded them that they could eat the next day, they would have life. The story is the inspiration for this book - *Sleeping with Bread*. The book is about noticing where God is leading you by noticing what gives you life and fulfillment. The idea is that you regularly spend some quiet time with God, perhaps each evening, and ask two questions: For what moment today am I most grateful? and for what moment today am I least grateful? After a few days of allowing God to direct your thoughts, you begin to see what gives you life in the things you do each day. It's in these life-giving places that Jesus, the bread of life, meets you and draws you closer to himself because he wants you to have a whole and fulfilled life, not to be a slave to the wants that can only leave you feeling hollow and dissatisfied with your life. If you're interested, borrow the book, it's something anyone can do to help them recognise God's presence in your everyday life.

I hope you enjoyed the bread you tasted. We'll share it again when we come to this table, when the bread we bring is changed by God so that it becomes for us the body of Jesus, who called himself the bread of life and life to each one who will accept it.

Blessings  
Gill