

## Sermon for 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity (16<sup>th</sup> August 2009)

A mother was making pancakes for her two sons, Matthew (5) and Thomas (3). The boys began to argue over who'd get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here," she said, "he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'" Matthew turned to his younger brother and said, "Thomas, you be Jesus!"

Why is it when we think about Jesus we see a hollow-cheeked young man who ate only when absolutely necessary and preferred to spend his life praying in the desert? Much of Jesus' ministry happened around meals and all the evidence of the gospels is that Jesus loved a party! Think of the stories of Jesus feeding the 5,000, eating meals with tax collectors, and his teaching that the kingdom of heaven is like a great banquet. One of the criticisms of Jesus was that he was a glutton and a drunkard! (Luke 7.34)! For Jesus, eating wasn't just a necessity, it was life-giving, both as bodily sustenance, and as a foretaste of the radical generosity that characterises the kingdom of God.

Just before today's gospel passage Jesus has miraculously fed 5000 people, and this is the third Sunday running we've heard Jesus talk about himself as food - "I am the bread of life" - and today "I am the living bread." In all three passages, food and life go together. In today's gospel, Jesus refers to life and living 9 times and says all who eat his flesh and drink his blood have eternal life. Life and food are inseparable - Jesus provides both.

Because the early church struggled to counter accusations of cannibalism at the Eucharist, they began to interpret Jesus' words here as referring to the Eucharist, the Greek word for Thanksgiving and saw this as a spiritual partaking in the body and blood of Christ. But the word Jesus uses for eating here is a Greek word meaning munch. There's nothing spiritualised about it, it's real eating. But the spiritualised understanding of Jesus' words and of the Eucharist are still with us. It's almost as though we don't dare enjoy this meal incase we appear not to be taking it seriously. We've distanced the Eucharist from everyday eating and drinking by replacing everyday bread with individual wafers, and by sharing such tiny quantities that it's hard to imagine it as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. But if we spiritualise what we do at this table too much we risk allowing ourselves to shut it away in a box that says Church and we can keep it locked away for Sundays and special occasions.

Eating and life are dynamically linked, in this passage, in Jesus' life - and in our lives, if we're followers of Jesus. Jesus offers us nurture and life. If our eating and drinking here is to bring us the wholeness of life Jesus promised, it needs to pervade everything we are, not be kept separate from daily life. The faith which brings us here is to be lived in our experiences and encounters each day; we must live the thanksgiving.

As Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the people, so his life and gifts were taken and blessed by God, broken and given for the world. And if we accept the nurture and life that

Jesus offers us, it means following Jesus' pattern of being taken by God for his work; blessed by God for his purposes; broken and vulnerable to all that the life of faith demands; and given to love and serve those around us. It's only when we live the thanksgiving that we begin to understand Jesus' words: "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him." Or her.

What does living the thanksgiving mean?

Taking is the offering of our gifts. At the Eucharist we bring gifts of bread, wine, our money and ourselves, and offer them to be used by God. What are your gifts? Do you use them in life-giving ways? To be used for God's service? Or do you hide your gifts, so that you can don't have to get too involved?

Blessing has two aspects: first we are chosen and blessed by God to belong to him and share his work; and second is our response to God, our giving praise to God and blessing his name as we go about our daily life. How aware are you of God in everyday things? Do you praise God for the things, good and bad, that happen to you. The habit of looking for God in everyday activities and acknowledging God's greatness through them is our response to the blessings showered on us by our generous God.

When the bread is broken we remember Jesus' broken body on the cross; we remember when two disciples recognised the risen Christ at the breaking of bread in their home in Emmaus. Brokenness is part of our world, and part of the lives of each of us. Usually we hide our brokenness and try to overcome it, but God calls us to recognise our weakness and offer it to him. God says: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor 12:9ff)

And finally giving. The bread at the table is shared freely among all who will receive it. Do you know the grace and love of God so deeply that you share it with the people you speak to each day? There are so many people who are looking for meaning in their lives and they don't know where to find it. We have the answer - we need to tell people that Jesus offers them nurture and life.

Sharing at this table is not about coming here every week to eat a wafer and take a sip of wine - it's about living as passionately and fully as Jesus, it's about living the thanksgiving in our daily lives. So I pray that in one way this week, you may live the thanksgiving more authentically, so that you may know Jesus the living bread feeding you and others through you.

Blessings  
Gill