

## **I am the Bread of Life – John 6.1-15 and 25-35**

I have something very important in this basket.

Yes, it is a vital necessity.

You can see what sort of size it is.

You may have guessed by now. (Produce loaf).

This is something we usually take for granted. Through much of the world it is the most basic of foods. The Bible tells us not to forget God's goodness to us. So today we have been thanking him for what he provides for us, like this (loaf), and these (harvest gifts).

In our Bible reading today we heard the account of how the Lord Jesus the fed people miraculously, after they had been out in the countryside listening to his teaching. What a wonderful miracle that was. It is the only miracle which Jesus did which is recorded in all four gospel accounts of his life on earth, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

A boy was the only one who had brought a picnic. He had five small barley loaves, the poor people's bread, and two small fish. Most of our bread is made from wheat. We grow barley chiefly for animal food, as they did then.

The boy's loaves would have been like a bap, like this one , or smaller, just enough for his lunch, and for a snack later. I presume a wise mother had sent him off with them.

And Jesus took them. He gave thanks; it is always good to give thanks to God before a meal, thanks for what he has provided for us. Then Jesus transformed the bread and the fish.

The five small loaves and two small fish became enough for 5000 men, and for however many women and children were there as well.

What a miracle! What a transformation! Even the bits left over filled 12 baskets!

It showed Jesus' power to transform. We will return to that later.

No wonder the crowds wanted more. Next day they were looking for Jesus again. Eventually they found him. They said, as we heard, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" (25) What they meant was "You gave us the slip; we've been looking for you everywhere".

Jesus did not answer their question. There was no point in him telling them how he had got there. Instead he replied "You're looking for another free meal aren't you".

Yes that's my translation; the Bible says he answered "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill". (26)

And then Jesus said something to challenge them. "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life" (27). "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life". In other words "Don't work for food that perishes, but for the food which keeps for ever".

The Lord Jesus often used overstatement to make his point. He is recorded as saying on another occasion that people should pull out their eyes, if through them they saw things which caused them to think wrong thoughts. He simply meant that we should take great care not to look at such things.

He also said, another time, that if we are going to follow him we must hate our nearest and dearest. He didn't mean that we should really hate them. He meant that our love for him must be much greater than our love even for our nearest and dearest, not that we should hate them. He made points by deliberate overstatement, so that people would remember his teaching.

And on this occasion he didn't mean that people should not work to earn bread, in order to sustain their physical lives on earth. He meant that we should work harder than that to find eternal food, spiritual food, which will nourish us spiritually, and which will give us spiritual and eternal life.

Here on earth we are apt to concentrate on sustaining our physical life. We take care to eat health giving food, not too little, not too much. Well, some of the time we do.

We avoid those things which might have disease in them, or too much fat, or too much salt, or too much something else, or much of anything which, when fed in large quantities to mice, causes cancer in them. We try to look after ourselves. We try to live as long as possible, and to help others to live as long as possible. We care for our physical health.

But what care do we take of our spiritual health?

Do we give so much time to finding spiritual food?

How much do we work for food that endures to eternal life?

Which is more important? Life here on earth, for a while, or life after death, for eternity?

"What must we do?" "What must we do?" That was the next question we heard that the people asked Jesus. "Then they asked him 'What must we do to do the works God requires?'" (28) 'What must we do to do the works God requires?'

Like most people in the world then, and before, and since, they thought that the way to heaven was through doing things, so that they could earn eternal life; whereas eternal life is a gift from God to all who believe in Jesus.

No harm in asking, they may have thought. We are not committing ourselves by asking. So they asked "What must we do to do the work God requires?"

Jesus' answer was very simple. "Jesus answered 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent'" (29). "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent". They knew by speaking of "the one (God) has sent" he meant himself. He was asking them to believe in him.

That can sound very easy to us at first. As some people like to say "No problem, no problem." Just believe in Jesus; that's easy .Or is it?

The people to whom Jesus was speaking did not think it was easy, so they hedged: “So they asked him ‘What miraculous sign then will you give us that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?’

Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’”. (30-31). In other words ‘You gave us bread for one day, yesterday. But Moses gave our ancestors bread every day, for 40 years. And it came straight out of heaven, he didn’t have any bread rolls to start with. Moses did a real miracle. What miracle will you do today to prove yourself? Then we might believe.’

Jesus had said “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

The people knew that believing in someone doesn’t just mean believing that he is whom he says he is.

It means following him. It means acting on our belief in him.

If you believe that some person’s ideas are best, you ought to put them into practice, if they are relevant to you. If you believe that some person is a good leader, you ought to follow him, if you need his leadership.

Just so with the Lord Jesus.

Maybe you are doing so. You have turned the belief in your head into following in your life, and you would not change that, even though things are not easy at times. Praise God.

The people in our reading were still talking about bread: so Jesus went on talking about bread. “Jesus said to them ‘I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’”. (32-33).

The people did not get the point. They replied “Sir, from now on give us this bread”. (34)

I think they had in mind a free lunch every day.

But Jesus then declared explicitly “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (35). “I am the bread of life.”

In other words, Jesus is the answer to all our needs. He is the true bread of life.

We need to feed on him; meaning we need to believe in him as the Son of God, to trust him, to read his word, to pray to him, to listen to him, to find what he wants of us, and to follow him.

We also need forgiveness for all we have done wrong, and for all we have failed to do right. Jesus died on the Cross bearing the punishment for all our wrongdoings and failures.

As the prophet Isaiah wrote, when seven centuries beforehand, he was foretelling Jesus’ death on the Cross, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him (on Jesus) the iniquity of us all.” (Isa. 53.6).

Some of you may have heard of Helen House in Oxford, which was the first hospice in England opened for dying children. One of my first wife, Jo's, nieces worked there as a counsellor for a time. An 11-year-old boy there once said "I think of God as a friend, as a guardian who loves me ... it's a pity adults find it so hard to believe. They are afraid and they don't want to face God, but that's completely wrong because God says he will always forgive us. I think Jesus finds it very sad when adults lose the faith that children have."

One day we will die; feeding this bread (the loaf) cannot prevent that. But Jesus has prepared a place in heaven for all who feed on him, for all who turn to him, for all who believe in him and follow him, with their sins forgiven. Alleluia!

We also need help to live better lives. When we turn in commitment to Jesus we are born again, and The Holy Spirit of Jesus comes into us, and he helps us live more and more as Jesus wishes us to do.

Sometimes we may have other needs too: we need comfort when in sorrow, we need company when lonely, we may need an uplift from depression, assurance when in doubt, wisdom to make right decisions, and strength to overcome problems - our needs will be met by Jesus if we turn to him. Our needs will be met by Jesus, if we feed on him, on the bread of life, on the bread of life, if we come to him, and stay close to him, and follow him day by day.

I wonder if there is anyone here who feels they need to turn and begin following Jesus? Or someone who feels the need to return to him? Jesus can transform your life if you feed on him, the bread of life.

When I was young I collected butterflies. I also bred them, including ones like this one, which fed on stinging nettles. Very nutritious food, stinging nettles. But not much of a life, crawling around a nettle bed. Even less when it finished growing and turned into a chrysalis, a pupa.

But then one summer day the pupa split, and out a butterfly crawled (a peacock butterfly). Its wings, which had been in tiny wing cases, expanded, and then gradually stiffened and dried. After a few hours it flew off, able to fly fast, beautiful; a transformation, a transformation.

I don't believe it is too much to say that Jesus can transform human life too, just as he transformed the five barley loaves and two fish to something far more.

Jesus can transform a life in a nettle bed to a sunlit life, eternal life, beginning now and continuing forever.

"Jesus declared 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'" (John 6.35).

We ought to be longing for forgiveness for our wrongdoing. We ought to be longing for someone who will help to live as we ought to live day by day. We ought to be longing for someone who will pray for us continually. We ought to be longing for someone who will

help us with our problems. We ought to be longing for assurance that there is a place in heaven for us.

If we come to Jesus we will never be hungry for these things. He is the bread of life. He will supply all these needs of ours, and more besides.

The Lord Jesus said "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty".

Let's have a short time of reflection and then a prayer.

Let's reflect in silence first.

Now let us pray.

Heavenly Father we thank you that the Lord Jesus said "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

We pray that anyone here today who has not yet begun to feed on the bread of life, will turn to the Lord Jesus, invite him into their life, and begin to follow him. We pray that all of us will feed on him day by day, finding him to be the answer to our needs here on earth, and rejoicing to meet him when we pass out of this life and enter heaven.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.