**I am the Bread of Life**

**John 6 v 35 - 58**

The theme of Jesus as bread has been a consistent theme over the last couple of weeks in the lectionary readings. We've had the feeding of the 5000, collecting of the 12 baskets of bread, the story of the children of Israel been fed manna in the wilderness and Jesus comparing himself to manna and bread. But not just any bread but the bread of life.

These people have put up to some extent with these parables and, because it has been to their benefit, they've been fed, sustained and healed - a good pay off really and small prices to pay for free food and healthcare. But now the rubber hits the road.

In this passage we see Jesus challenging the following crowd about their motives. He's had enough of them just following him for what they can get and he rebukes them; he wants them to move away from the physical and go deeper, move away from the basics and move into something much more significant.

He make a profound statement, referring to the Exodus story: I am the bread that came down from heaven. They would have made the connection straight away from the manna that came down from heaven, the supernatural food, God fed the children of Israel in the wilderness.

And it’s not surprising they begin to challenge Jesus about this. it was alright to go along with his parables while they were getting fed, but now he's gone a bit too far.

By making this bold statement Jesus would have known that this would have caused uproar, that this statement would have caused some dispute. This profound statement wasn’t an accident on Jesus' part, it was meant to cause some reaction by the hearers.

This issue of food and being fed would have taken a back burner and thoughts would have turned to this hard saying and if I'm honest this is where I would have to side with the crowd. What does he mean? We know it not literal, as cannibalism was against Jewish law, so what is Jesus implying, what does he want them, and us, to get?

I think, Jesus is is implying that apart from him they have no life, this food is this bread, this drink, is the visible embodiment of the reality of life. Jesus is the sustainer, the giver of life and not to partake in that, means we are not accessing all that Jesus is freely offering. Our physical needs, the necessity of being fed, can be a distraction; it can drive us, be our focus.

Here Jesus is calling us into a much deeper walk, with him. Jesus is offering himself, he’s offering intimacy, and he’s offering relationship. He wants us to be hungry for him. And that why this is such a hard saying, because Jesus goes straight to the heart of the matter, our heart, our motives and our intentions.

What are we following him for? What do we want? Is it just out of tradition? Is it just something we do on a Sunday? Is it an academic, intellectual thing?

Jesus exposes the hearts of the crowd and, if we read further on in John’s gospel, some of the followers leave. They decide they can no longer follow him. This statement was too hard, too much of an offence. It's all or nothing as far as Jesus is concerned. You have to partake of him; there are no substitutes. The crowd has been following him for what they can get and here Jesus cuts to the chase; he deals with their heart.

We can use all kinds of avoidance tactics with Jesus. We can use all kinds of issues of distraction; we can follow Jesus for all the wrong reasons, reasons other than love, but the bold statement in John reminds us that he will not have any substitutes. Do we want him or not? Are we prepared to follow him or not? Are we willing to relinquish all for him or not? And offering Jesus our endeavours or our achievements as some kind of substitute isn't going cut it with Jesus.

He sees right through that. And that is why the religious leaders of the day were threatened by Jesus. He could see through all that religious facade, their religious tradition. Jesus goes back to the Exodus story, to their history, to prove his point. Tradition cannot bring life, he says. Your ancestors ate manna and they are dead. Here Jesus offers something better than dead religion. What he is offering is eternal, food and drink that is sustainable, life giving. We can receive it or continue with our tradition, back to business as usual.

Jesus isn’t happy with our business as usual mentality; he comes to offer us something totally new something totally different - himself - and he requires nothing less from us than ourselves. This partaking of his flesh and his blood ushers us into a new realm of fellowship which means we live because of his life flowing through us; we are sustained, renewed and loved. In return we can love, encourage and enable others. This is the beauty and the mystery of partaking, that not only are we restored, but we also become restorers; we not only become healed, but we also become healers and we are not only loved, but we now are also able to love others.

Jesus is the bread that fulfils all our hunger and thirst. Jesus frees us to follow him, not to achieve self-satisfaction, not to get anything that is just for us, not even to attain or maintain peace of mind. Jesus frees us to embrace God's redeeming will to restore the cosmos to what God created and humanity to what God intends.

Such faith does not mean separating the spiritual out of the social. It means putting God, rather than us, at the centre of both. When we do, we can and will expect more.

Amen.