

Sermon Series John 6

2: Bread of Life - John 6: 35-38,41-51

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits for him,
and in his word is my hope;

Well, here we are again in lock down. I don't know about you, but when I heard about it on Thursday night, my heart sank. From the joy of last Sunday's gathering together, to being confined to our homes and worshipping on Zoom. The rollercoaster that has been 2020 and 2021 continues and I do wonder if we will ever return to normal – whatever normal was or might become. On Friday, at the weekly zoom gathering of Oodthenong clergy, we reflected on Mark's version of the Transfiguration, and I was reminded that God is with us when we are at the top of the mountain and when we are tumbling around at his feet. It is in God's providence that we experience life in its entirety – the joyful and the challenging, and most importantly, that God is with us throughout, if only we would take the time to know God's presence, to allow our souls to wait for the Lord, who is our hope.

So today, as we continue to delve into Chapter 6 of John's Gospel, I want to explore this idea of God's presence, particularly as it comes in the form of Jesus. Who is Jesus? Do we grumble like the people of Galilee? I know I've been grumbling since Thursday! And what does Jesus mean when he says "I am the bread of life"? Our reading today opens and closes with this metaphor. Let's take some time to unpack it, to understand it, and then to apply it to our lives today.

Our reading this week, continues the conversation Jesus was having with the people of Galilee. Last week they were asking for more signs that he was the prophet, the new Moses who was going to save them from the Roman

overlords, and he was challenging their belief and understanding of scripture. They brought up the topic of manna, or bread from heaven, provided by God to the Israelites in the wilderness following their flight from Egypt. And Jesus takes this on and says “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Here is the first of the “I am” statements that Jesus makes throughout the Gospel of John. It speaks into his identity with echoes of that divine self definition in Exodus 3:14 – I am who I am. And this particular “I am” statement is repeated in our reading at verses 48 and 51. What does Jesus mean when he says I am the bread of life, or I am the living bread, or I am the bread that came down from heaven?

Certainly his listeners were confused. They began to grumble and question his identity. Wasn’t he the son of Joseph and Mary? How could he say “I came down from heaven?”

To answer this and understand who Jesus is, we need only to look at the beginning of the Gospel when John says, in echoes of Genesis:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

We heard last week that John concluded in chapter 20 that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing in him we will have life. And this direct linking of Jesus with God is also found at the very beginning of the Gospel. God became flesh and lived among us as Jesus.

It is amazing isn’t it? And mind blowing! We believers, 2000 years later, take it on board with faith and the scriptures, but what must it have been like to be there with Jesus when these claims were brand new, made by a person that they had grown up with? Perhaps speaking in metaphor using the most

common analogies, bread, water, light, life would make sense and help with understanding.

And the message from Jesus is very centered on God isn't it? He says at verse 37 "All those the Father gives me" and at verse 44 "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me." It seems to me that Jesus is saying that we are all here because the Father, who creates, who makes, who sends, has drawn us in, into this community to be followers of Jesus. How does it feel to hear that? That we are gathered in this place by Zoom because the Father draws us in? I have always responded when asked how I was called to ministry, that it was not so much of a calling but a drawing in. I felt God drawing me in, firstly as a believer, and then as I became more and more engaged with my church community, and then as a theological student and finally drawn into ordination.

So why does Jesus use the metaphor of bread? Bread nourishes us, it sustains us and enables us to grow. Bread in all its various forms, is one of the most common, staple foods in the world. It is eaten by most people, rich and poor. It's not like cake or caviar, something special for the privileged. It is a marvelous metaphor, for that which sustains us in life. It's a basic food for everyone and, by implication, is available for everyone, and Jesus says "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry." And he backs this up with "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." The bread of life is available to anyone who comes, and when they come to Jesus, they will not be rejected.

And Jesus makes it very clear that he is not talking about the physical hunger that keeps us from starving when he says "Your ancestors ate the manna from heaven and they died." He is not talking about regular eating, which is how the manna was understood. The bread of life that he is talking about is the fulfilment of the yearning of the human spirit. The hunger he is talking

about is the hunger for something more than what we have: the good food, the fast cars, the beautiful homes, the Olympic games! These things, as good as they can be, still leave us with a sense of dissatisfaction, an inner ache, an ongoing search or longing, for meaning. Jesus says “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes, has eternal life. I am the bread of life.” This backs up what he said last week. “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

It makes sense doesn’t it? Jesus is the source of meaning, the source of life. Jesus is God and Jesus alone can satisfy the heart. In today’s western society, we have experimented with every form of material, physical and spiritual comfort to try and fill the inner emptiness of our hearts, and Jesus’ invitation, gift comes with particular relevance in our modern, broken world. This belief, this bread of life, this gift of eternal life is offered and is about now, about how we live our lives and how we find meaning, now. This gift sustains us now, it pours warmth, peace and grace into our hungry hearts so that we can be reconciled with God, and live, now, and forever. To turn away from this gift is death. To accept this gift is life.

So, when we eat the bread of life, freely available for anyone, in other words, when we believe in Jesus, we will not be rejected, and we will receive the grace and peace which passes all understanding, now. This is the life that Jesus offers. It starts now and goes on forever.

So how do you find the bread of life? What sustains you in these difficult times? Perhaps this lock down gives us an opportunity to find the presence of God in our own lives. Perhaps finding Jesus is like finding a new friend or a new community. We need to invest time and space to allow him to nurture and sustain us. What might this investment look like in your life? Is it finding some quiet time during the day to be with God. Perhaps your time with God is a time of prayer, a time where you talk with God about your hopes, your

dreams, your challenges, your joys. Perhaps you're a great interceder, you pray for others, those close to you, those in community with you, those far away. Perhaps you're a listener. You find the quiet space and meditate, listening for God, finding God in the in breath, the breath of life. Perhaps you're a walker, and find God in the beauty of creation, in the many local walks, around this place. Like the psalmist today, we long for God, our souls wait for the lord, and in his word is our hope: that when we come to him, we will never be hungry, and when we believe in him, we will never be thirsty.

God bless you and keep you.