

Reading: John 6:25-35

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, 'Rabbi, when did you get here?'²⁶ Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.

'²⁸ Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?'²⁹ Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.

'³⁰ So they asked him, 'What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

'³² Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, 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. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

'³⁴ 'Sir,' they said, 'always give us this bread.

'³⁵ Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

The latest off the internet – letters from children to their pastors:

Dear Vicar, I'm sorry I can't leave more money in the plate, but my father didn't give me a raise in my pocket money. Could you have a sermon about a raise in my pocket money? Love, Patty (age 10,

Dear vicar, I think a lot more people would come to your church if you moved it to Disneyland. Loreen (age 9

Dear Vicar, Please say in your sermon that Peter Peterson has been a good boy all week. I am Peter Peterson. Sincerely, Pete (age 9,

Dear Vicar, Please say a prayer for our Football team. We need God's help or a new Goalkeeper. Thank you. Alexander (age 10,

Dear Vicar, I liked your sermon on Sunday. Especially when it was finished. Ralph (age 11,).

Children have a refreshing honesty when it comes to expressing what they want and need.

Adults on the other hand, tend to be blind to their real needs.

In the Verses immediately before our reading today we see how John moves us from the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 to this passage about the bread of life.

In that passage, we can see that everybody has a hungry heart that only Jesus can fill. We also see that Jesus reveals himself in a special way to his disciples so that their faith is encouraged.

Today's passage introduces the concept of Jesus as the bread of life.

If everybody has a hungry heart, then Jesus is the bread that satisfies that hunger.

This is an important image – bread is wholesome and nourishing. It sustains us and gives us energy. The call, then, is to come and feast upon Jesus, the bread of life.

Hunger and thirst matter to God. Life matters to God. Justice matters. Health matters.

The reason for this is because the world matters and people matter.

God is not indifferent to the state of his world. Poverty and injustice are always on his agenda as they are imposters on the good world that he created.

One day, when Jesus returns, the world will be made new and all injustice, all poverty, all hunger and thirst will be overcome and destroyed. Injustices will be righted and the poor will be fed.

When the earth is finally renewed all tears will be wiped away and God's kingdom will be established on earth once and for all, as it is already in heaven.

Jesus' prayer for the kingdom to come will finally be answered and everyone will have enough 'daily bread' for their needs. God will live with his people and the curse of death and all the associated diseases that lead to death (social, emotional and physical) will be destroyed once and for all.

This is our hope and our destiny. This is our good news.

God's love and power will win his world back and restore the world to its rightful order under his loving rule.

This is the story that we live in and that should give us hope for our lives.

This is our faith. And this faith, this belief, originates in Jesus - his life, death and resurrection - and it is this belief that feeds us and sustains us, in the midst of life.

It is also this belief that shapes the way we live and act every moment of every day. The faith Jesus is talking about is not just mentally assenting to an abstract idea about Jesus (about him being God for example) it is the active faith that is better expressed by the word 'trust'.

In this way, this message of Jesus is significant for us as we celebrate Harvest for it both offers us hope and it shapes our lives.

Harvest is a time when we reconnect with the physicality of our human lives - a time when we remember just how dependent we are on the earth for our life, just how much we need bread and water day after day.

In our culture we can easily forget this, as we are distanced from the production of food and can turn on a tap without thinking.

So often we need harvest to help reconnect us to the reality of our physical dependence on the land and on those who farm it for us. And with this in mind we are moved to celebrate and rejoice in all that God has provided for us. This is a great part of harvest

Harvest is also a time when we reconnect with the stories and experiences of those in our own communities and those much further away who are poor, who are hungry or thirsty.

We intentionally reflect on their lives and reorient ourselves towards generosity and acts of love.

And today in some small way we are trying to show this by our gifts through Baby Basics to those new mothers who are struggling.

This is basic Christian discipleship and we take the call to make sure that there are no poor among us seriously.

When Jesus is offering himself as the answer to our deepest hunger and thirst he is not diminishing or downplaying the importance of the reality of physical hunger or dismissing the poverty of those around him.

He is rather using this powerful everyday reality and experience (common to his first listeners) as the best metaphor he had available to him that would help everyone realise just how important his life and ministry was for the world.

When he is declaring himself to be the 'bread of life' he is making an incredible claim. He is inviting people to see him as the source of life, the foundation of life, the nourishment of life, the food of life.

Hunger and thirst was a common experience for Jesus' contemporaries. First century Palestine was hit by repeated famine and poverty. And so Jesus uses these powerful and painful experiences to highlight the significance of his own life and ministry to his first followers.

'I am as significant to your life as bread,' he is saying. 'Fulfilment and satisfaction is found in me'.

Of course, Jesus is borrowing from a rich stream of Old Testament imagery - everyone knew the story of the manna that sustained the hungry people of Israel as they were set free from captivity.

And everyone would have known the prophetic words of Isaiah 55

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.

Jesus is inviting his listeners to make the link between the manna and the bread, with him, with his life, with his ministry.

“I am the bread,” he says. “ME. Here. Now. Come to ME if you need filling. Come to ME if you are hungry. Come to ME. Trust ME. Follow ME. Live like ME. Become MY disciple. Believe in ME.

And then you will have real life.

”This is an invitation to those of us who have plenty and it is an invitation to those of us who have nothing.

We are being offered a new way of orienting our lives towards God and towards others. We are being offered the hope of life from Jesus.

We are also being offered a way to live.

We are being invited into the same kind of trusting life that Jesus exhibited and which expresses itself in radical generosity.

Not worrying about what we shall eat or drink, what we have to wear, or what our homes are like, we are able to be moved by the needs of others and respond in gracious acts of love and kindness

The hallmark of the faith that Jesus is inviting us into is always grace, generosity and giving.

Taking bread in his hands, giving thanks for it, breaking it and giving it, Jesus gave us a pattern that we have long since followed.

This is the meaning of Harvest.

As we break bread together, in church services and in our homes, as we eat and drink together, we should be aware that we are sharing in the goodness of God, the goodness of the earth, we should celebrate all that Jesus, the creator of the world, has given us.

We give thanks (Eucharist). We then break the bread remembering the way that Jesus gave away his life for us and we are drawn into the same story of self-giving ourselves - breaking our lives open for others.

We then receive and eat - bread not made by us, but given to us, freely.

And as we feed on this bread we invite this Jesus to reside in us, to live in us and through us so that his will be done in us and through us, his kingdom will come in us and through us.

This is our prayer. This is our celebration. This is our identity.

Jesus offers us hope - here is LIFE - receive it - receive me. I will fulfil you.

And Jesus offers us a way to live –

here is what it means to believe - follow me. I am the bread of life