



## Worship: Sunday 8 August 2021

*(no recording this week)*

### Introduction

Welcome to worship this morning. Jesus describes himself as the ‘bread of life’. This causes consternation among the Jewish crowd. There is a very real sense of disbelief that the son of a local carpenter could do anything other than follow the family trade, and certainly not talk about having

come from heaven. When we journey with God, anything is possible: we are challenged to push our limits. When we walk closely with Jesus, anything is possible: we are reminded that everyone has their own story to tell. When we welcome the Holy Spirit, anything is possible: we are invited to share in the bread of heaven that always satisfies. Lord God, you have the bread of life for the hungry and living water for the thirsty. We come hungry and thirsty for your word, with a desire to know your will and to love with your unconditional love. Help us to be fed and to learn from you. Amen.

**Hymn** 529 Light of the minds that know him

### Opening prayers

Bread of life, complete sustainer, provider of all that we need, we come before you – seeking you, believing and trusting – so that we may never hunger and thirst again. Limitless God, thank you that we cannot contain you, that you are unfathomable and always up to something! We worship and adore you. Just when we think we have worked it all out, you surprise us! Gracious God, we are truly blessed by you. Thank you, that as we bow down humbly at your throne, we know that only you can satisfy our needs. Praise you, Lord God. When we make wrong assumptions about others and judge the way they live: **forgive us, Lord, for limiting people and possibilities.** When we don’t allow others to speak out and be the people you have called them to be: **forgive us, Lord, for limiting people and possibilities.** When we cast judgements on particular communities or neighbourhoods that are different from ours: **forgive us, Lord, for**

**limiting people and possibilities.** Let us journey together towards wholeness and healing, knowing that only God can sustain us and set us free.

Giver and sustainer of life, through the power of the cross we are a forgiven people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, chosen by you who has called us out of darkness into your marvellous light. **Amen.**

**Readings** 1 Kings 19.4-8, John 6.35, 41-51

### Reflection

Chapter 6 of John’s gospel is a long and very interesting chapter. It starts with the feeding of the 5000 and then goes on to Jesus walking on water then Jesus talks about being the bread of life and finishes with disciples deserting Jesus. All packed into 71 verses.

Today we are concentrating on part of the bread of life section, verses 35,45-51 that we have just heard read. Twice in this passage Jesus says he is the bread of life (v35 & v48) and this is the first of the 7 ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus in John’s gospel. The theme for today according to Roots, the material I use for preparation, is life without limits. A strange theme as we are living in times of many restrictions and limits. However, I will explore this in relation to the reading.

The feeding of the 5000 at the beginning of the chapter is a feeding of the physical body but Jesus is trying to get across to the crowds the concept of spiritual feeding by explaining his connection to God by using the bread again.

Jesus comes out and speaks in public as plainly as he has ever done in this Gospel: he is the bread of life and coming to follow him will ensure that no one hungers or thirsts on the journey of following him in the world. But such plain speaking is also off-putting, and the crowd complain against him – just as their ancestors did in the desert. They claim to know who Jesus is. He is not the bread of heaven; he is Joseph’s son, a boy whose mother and father they know – so he can’t be anyone special.

How quick we are to judge people’s value by where they come from or what they do. Lord Digby Jones criticised Alex Scott for her pronunciation in presenting the Olympics on TV; she soon came back

to explain her situation. The multiple Women's FA Cup winner wrote to Lord Digby Jones: "I'm from a working-class family in East London, Poplar, Tower Hamlets & I am PROUD. Proud of the young girl who overcame obstacles, and proud of my accent! It's me, it's my journey, my grit. Never allow judgments on your class, accent, or appearance hold you back. Use your history to write your story. Keep striving, keep shining & don't change for anyone."

Of course, if the crowd really knew their history, they would know that it was full of people snatched from obscurity, from ordinary lives, and given life-changing and life-giving roles in the story of redemption (e.g. Moses, Elijah, David, Ruth – and a whole host of other Old Testament stars). I am sure you can think of current people who have come from relative obscurity and done good things. Marcus Rashford comes to mind. During the last 16 months or so there have been many heroes, unsung heroes. The One Show has been highlighting one person each week they wish to give a big thank you to for what they are doing in their community.

Now Jesus goes on to talk about how things will happen at the end of time (eschatology) people can only relate to him if God draws them to him, and this is all leading up to the last day (the eschaton) when Jesus – not God – will raise those who have come to him as a result of the Father's grace (v.44). The Jewish people had come to believe that they would enjoy resurrection at the end of history and Jesus says that he is the key to that.

Then he says that if they knew their history, the history they keep reciting at him, they would know that the prophets had predicted all this, that God spoke to his people, and led them to himself (the quotation of Isaiah 54.13 in v.45). And Jesus is claiming that he is the fulfilment of all this, that those who believe in him enjoy the eternal life he bestows on those drawn to him by his Father. He is the source of the life so many are searching for, and the people need to change their assumptions about God and about him.

Again, he says, 'I am the bread of life.' But now he says that those who ate in the wilderness the first time died – partly because they all fell under God's judgement for their lack of belief and desire to

worship something more manageable (i.e. the golden calf). But those who come to Jesus will never die. He has to say this twice, because what he is suggesting is so difficult for them to get their heads round. How will this happen? They will be sustained for the journey by the bread that he gives, namely his flesh. Well, that's going to get a reaction, isn't it? Jesus is the bread of life, the source of spiritual food we need to keep us going by us believing in the fact he was a real person of flesh and blood. verse 57 summarises the chapter Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. Feeding ourselves on the Bible stories and our faith will sustain us to have eternal life with him. That is life without limits and it is what I believe and understand by Jesus saying he is the bread of life. Maybe you do too. Amen

**Hymn** 199 Jesus the Lord says, I am the bread

### **Prayers for the people**

This week, as we pray for other people, let us ask God to help us see them from his perspective, rather than making assumptions.

Lord, we lift to you our world leaders. It is so easy to be critical of them, to believe what we read in the papers or on social media rather than seeing them as people just like us with needs like ours. In an increasingly unstable world we ask you to give them wisdom and integrity. Help them to put the needs of their country before their own desires. We pray for countries at war or suffering long periods of unrest, particularly Afghanistan and the Middle East. It's so easy for people to take sides and fight rather than try and see the world from the perspective of others. We pray that a new desire to love and treasure others may sweep this planet, bringing in a new reign of peace.

In our country, Lord, We pray for our government, as the problems of Covid-19 continue to beset us all. Help us not to be critical of the rules and regulations and the people who make them but, instead, to do our best to keep others safe.

Lord, we pray for our communities and all who live and serve in them. We thank you for those who sweep our streets, empty our bins

and clean our shops, workplaces and hospitals. We pray for your strength and reassurance for our over-stretched NHS and for tired teachers trying to have a summer break. We pray for the unemployed and those on zero hours contracts struggling to make ends meet. And, Lord, we pray for the people overlooked by society or considered insignificant. We ask that we, as a church, may find ways to help the disadvantaged in our communities in the short-term whilst praying that our government may have the courage to find long-term solutions.

We come before you, Lord, in sorrow that so many people in our world are abused or neglected because of their race, colour or gender. We lift up the millions of refugees fleeing unsafe homes. We pray for the migrants trying to cross the channel and we pray too for those who exploit them. We ask you to give strength and courage to all those fighting for justice in our world. We ask you to give us all the eyes to see everyone as made in your image with equal worth.

Finally, Lord, we commit to you those who live around us. We picture them in our minds now as we bring them to you for blessing: our friends, our neighbours, the people who walk their dogs past our house, those we say 'hi' to in the street or at the station or on the bus but don't know their names. We pray for those who live behind closed doors that we never see, those we used to spend time with who, for whatever reason, we don't see anymore. And we pray for those whom we avoid... Lord, you know them all by name and we thank you for each of them and for the way they touch our lives. Give us the grace to be good neighbours, willing to go the extra mile for all these people who are, underneath it all, just the same as us.

All-seeing and everloving God, help us to see others as your children, cherished by you. Help us to serve one another because we are all made in your image. Help us to bring your love to everyone we meet this week.

Amen.

## **Lord's Prayer**

## **Offertory prayer**

Gracious Lord, we thank you for not setting limits on what we can achieve. We continue to give according to our means either as money or service to encourage others to come to believe in the eternal life you offer. Lord, bless our gifts. Amen

## **Hymn**

339 Great God, your love has called us here

## **Blessing**

Thank you, Lord, for believing in us, for seeing beyond our outside and knowing who we really are inside. Thank you for giving us all we need to do your work, even when others may tell us we are 'only'. Thank you, Lord, for calling us to be adverts for you, so that others can see that you also believe in them.

The grace

Amen.