

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

Psalm 130

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

“Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.”

Yes, here we go again, it is bread again and we are going to be with it for a few more weeks! All my clergy friends have ducked this Gospel and gone instead for the epistle. But chapter 6 of John’s Gospel is a gift to a former high school English teacher when it comes to symbolism, metaphor and figurative language. So I thought we could spend a few weeks looking at in greater detail. So here we go on what I call a teachy preach, or a preachy teach.

The key themes here are bread and water; the very things that sustain life. As these themes are developed, each is subtly nuanced to reveal a different layer of theological meaning, rather like peeling an onion. In fact, most of our theology about Jesus, what we call Christology, is here in this chapter. It is here that we discover what divinity is through Jesus’ images of himself as living bread.

So let’s start with the first layer of this onion. We began two weeks ago, with the literal image of physical bread in the feeding of the five thousand. The key point being one of divine power and God’s love for us, so abundant that we can have all we need and there will still be twelve baskets over.

Last week, we heard Jesus tell us that physical bread is not all that the living bread is about. That it is He, Jesus, who is the living bread, sent down like manna from heaven from God, in fulfillment of the prophets. Skeptical at first, who wouldn’t be, the people struggle to understand. When they do glimpse the truth, they ask Jesus how they can have this living bread always. Christ tells them they need to believe in him. That the key to receiving this bread is to believe in Christ.

Now let’s peel off another layer. In today’s passage Jesus asserts again: *“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”* He goes on to explain that it is the Father, God, who draws us to him for sustenance, *“No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me...”* Now, a present day example of this for me is how young people who have not been church-ed tend to become seekers. Often they are seeking for a deeper meaning in life. To make sense of the big questions of why, how and what for. Many churches open their doors with seeker services and inquirers classes, especially for those who have been prompted by God to come seeking.

This is the key to this week’s meaning: *“Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.”* *“...heard and learned...”* So the bread of life in this passage refers to the Word of God. It’s worth noting at this point that the Gospel of John is all about divine power. Jesus is, from the outset, the Word. *“In the beginning the word was made flesh...”* is the Christmas gospel from John. Not a stable, star or shepherd in sight! This teaching this morning is rooted right there. It is the same Word that spoke the world into existence. Perhaps Big Bang is a scientific description of God’s voice?

More than that, in Exodus, you remember, God refers to God self as I am. That is God’s name. In the gospel of John we have a whole series of Jesus’ I am statements. *“I am the bread*

of life"; "I am the truth, the life and the way"; "I am the vine" and so on. These are all metaphors for God's power. Jesus is all of these things because not one of them can fully capture the essence of God's divine being.

It is the Word of God then that will bring us into a closer relationship with him who yearns to be with us. Jesus explains that we are invited by God to hear the word. "*It is written in the prophets, 'and they shall all be taught by God.'*" And when we are taught we can choose to follow Christ or not. In this sense he is talking about the spiritual bread of life that is what we know about God and Christ from the holy books. How else will we know about him?

Here at St Barnabas many of us have spent this week with almost 60 children aged from about three to fifteen. We have lived in the Word of God, singing, praying and listening to the stories of Peter and his friend Jesus. We learned that we are accepted by God just as we are, as Jesus befriended Peter, a poor fisherman with an impulsive streak, and made him the rock on which the Church was built. You would be so proud of how these kids accepted each other. How they welcomed each other, how they shared and cooperated. They learned that Jesus has chosen each one of them as he chose Peter, to be his special friend and longs to be in relationship with them. They learned that they are accepted, just as they are, as beloved children.

We also heard the story of Jesus walking on the water and that Jesus protects us, and reaches out to support us when we sink in the waters of life, when we discover that we can't walk on water – just as he reached out to catch Peter as he sank on the waves; we learned that God saves us; that Peter was the first to recognize Jesus as the savior, the Messiah, and that we will be saved if we confess his name. We also heard how Christ forgives us when we make a mistake. Peter, his best friend, messed up big time and denied his friend Jesus three times and was heartbroken when he realized what he had done, and so was forgiven. We heard that Christ lives on through us, as he did in Peter and his followers in the ways we try to do what we have heard and learned about Jesus' life and ways.

"I am the living bread...Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." said Jesus. How else are we and our children to know how to live a rich, fulfilled life that is shaped by Christ? How else will we know the loyal, loving presence of God in our lives? How else are we to become imitators of God?

The Word of God is the living bread incarnate in Christ. It is the bread that fills us and strengthens us in the choppy waters of our lives when we feel we are sinking. The Word of God is where we find our comfort, our guide; where we know that we are beloved, accepted, protected and forgiven. Life isn't always easy, things are not always great. They never have been, the Bible tells us, for the people of God; but it also tells us that Christ our redeemer, savior and faithful friend journeys alongside us always. +

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