

Sermon, 9th August 2026 6pm, Revd James Shakespeare

JOHN 6. 35, 41-51

Words from Ps 63 which speak to the heart of this evening's NT reading
"My soul thirsts for you, O God; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry land where there is no water." + from John 6.35, Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry & whoever believes in me will never thirst."*

What feeds us & gives us nourishment? It is a question that would never have been far from the surface, either consciously or unconsciously, for Jesus' contemporaries. And it's a question that bursts with significance for most people in our globalised world today:

- In Jesus' time Palestine consisted, apart from the minority who were rich, of a majority of landless peasants and of villagers living precariously on the proceeds of land and sea.
- People knew what it meant to be hungry and, in the harsh middle eastern climate, to thirst
- They knew what it meant to feel utterly dependant on nature, and on whatever bounty God (in his generosity) gave them
- This is why Feeding of the 5,000 (found, here, earlier in John 6) was such a significant miracle or sign, because it registered with people's essential hunger & thirst – something Jesus concerned to relate to
- +This is why food played such an important part in the beliefs and rituals of the Jewish people, in their festivals of harvest and of Passover, because it reminded them of their basic need and dependence on the God who provided for them

What feeds us & gives us nourishment? To answer this we need to acknowledge that, to be fulfilled as human beings, we need to be fed on many different levels:

- There is the basic physical & economic level of food and drink for our survival, let alone our enjoyment
- There is the level of human community & belonging; something which Jesus put a lot of emphasis on, perhaps explaining why for the people he made whole, restoring some sense of connection with society and community was always part of the package
- There is the level of wisdom, of food for the mind, such that Solomon was blessed with, and every Jew – in the observance of their faith and the study of their Torah – aspired to be guided by
- And there is the level, related to all of these, of spiritual nourishment – of food for the soul, that which meets our own deepest needs, hopes & yearnings.

So what does our Gospel have to say to us about being fed & nourished by God, and what he gives us to meet our deepest needs & wants?

The first thing that Jesus reminds us, as we meditate on his words, is our need – before all else – to know our hunger & dependence on God. *‘Blessed are those who hunger’* Jesus says in the Beatitudes *‘for they will be filled’*, *‘blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’*

I believe that those who have never been hungry or have never felt acute human need, at whatever level, may never know their need of God – and of his living food. Jesus knew this, and this is why he ministered to a people who were hungry and thirsty, not just for human food, but for the food of eternal life.... We need to find ways, in our generally comfortable and consumer driven society, to rediscover a sense of our basic human need and fragility, and therefore of our need of God to nourish and sustain us.

Secondly, Jesus makes a statement in our Gospel today, which would radically revolutionise inherited religious traditions, when he says, *‘I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’*

Jesus inhabited a religious culture that, as we have seen, was full of allusions to food and drink – not just the festivals of Passover and harvest, but the whole business of temple sacrifice, and of sacrificial blood (usually the blood of lambs and bulls) used as a means of securing holiness & life for the people. But, guided by God and knowing his own divinely appointed role in our salvation, Jesus went way beyond all of this – for he claimed to be food and drink for the people himself. Speaking out of his relationship with his Father, Jesus offered himself as living bread, and anticipating his death, He pointed to the gift of his own flesh and blood in the gift of the eucharist.

Our religious culture today, with its assumptions about spirituality being a purely inward and non-material experience, may at times shrink from this language. But we are challenged here to remember that Jesus, word made flesh, does not offer to feed us in an other-worldly and mystical sense alone, but through the gift of his very own flesh and blood.

And it is this process of eating and drinking, of receiving the eucharist and living as Eucharistic people – people who share the basic stuff of life, infused with God’s life-giving presence – that makes us Christians. *‘Just as the living Father sent me’* says Jesus, *‘and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me’*. In other words, just as Jesus’ life consists in his close relationship with God, so too our lives and wellbeing consists in our intimate relationship with Jesus through a living faith + through the eucharist – through being nourished, body & soul, by him.

So, knowing our need of God + our need of all the other things that make life possible (food and drink & fellowship & mental nourishment), we are fed – at root – by the eucharist & a living faith in Christ. Every time we receive the bread and wine, we receive the life and grace and the nourishing presence of God himself, made flesh in Jesus.

But, our faith reminds us, our sharing in the eucharist – God’s gift of faith– does not end here, in a private act of worship, because (as we are nourished here) we discover that the significance of Eucharistic living goes well beyond this. For as we eat and drink these things, living tokens of God’s love, we are empowered to live the Eucharist in our everyday lives: to share God’s gifts with others: to share bread & human fellowship, living graciously, concerned about all the things that enable all God’s people to be fed.

This is why Jesus fed the crowds, this is why he taught his disciples (at the last supper) to love one another, and this is why Christians – down the ages – have felt empowered (by the eucharist and by worship) not simply to receive life, but to give and to share life. Because, like the Israelites in the wilderness, fed by manna, but only of far wider significance - Jesus’ gifts are for all people, everywhere - his food salvation and nourishment for the whole world. For here we are fed + life is made whole, and indeed every time *‘we eat his flesh and drink his blood we have eternal life’*, sharing in the first fruits of a creation restored and a fallen world made whole. Something we are privileged to receive and bound to share. *Amen*