

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 5th August 2018
Trinity 10

I am the bread of life

Over the coming weeks much of what you will hear from the gospel readings will stem from the events of last week's reading, the feeding of the 5000. I must admit I struggle with this miracle, as do most biblical scholars. What on earth does the story mean? Jesus could muster up enough food to feed a huge crowd? Is it a metaphor for Jesus ability to give sustenance to many? Was it the actions of the boy in offering what little he had that encouraged others to share what they had? Is this a redacted story to emphasises Jesus' power and authority even over nature (he both walks on water and stills a storm as well as heals the blind and makes the lame walk). All are possible, what's really important for us is what we get out of it.

Today's pericope centres around the bread. What the people got out of it. Of course, bread as a staple is very important. In modern western world we perhaps have lost the importance of bread as we can pick it off the shelf. But in the time of Jesus having bread determined whether you lived or died. A drought and crop failure just once could mean the end. Here Jesus has given bread that he says is eternal. Imagine not having to worry about failed harvests ever again.

Recently a cache of bread has been discovered that has changed our view of early human beings. I'm sure you will have heard of on the news, 254 pieces of 14.5 thousand year old bread. 5000 years older than what was thought to be the worlds oldest bread this discovery has challenged our view of early human beings. You see it was believed bread making came from the fact that human kind had settled and become farmers. With this new find we discover nomadic humans made bread, that food was produced for more than just the calories it offered and food had gained social, cultural and possibly ideological aspects. Food was more than a function. Here it is thought the bread was part of a religious feast, emphasised by the fact that it would have been very hard and costly to make, would have been a highly valued item and within it would have been set special significance. Bread has then played an important part in our rituals and understanding of ourselves in the context of the world.

This basic food stuff, which we take for granted, retains a high level of significance for a large part of humanity today. Bread draws in so many associations: sustenance, celebration, gathering, sharing. For Jesus to announce himself the Bread of Life becomes a huge thing.

For the people of Israel God gave life to their ancestors through the gift of the bread from heaven. How then could Jesus be that bread? The people then make the most annoying demand, "do us a miracle so we can believe in you". But Jesus has just fed 5000 people and walked on water... what else could they possibly need. Again the point is missed for Jesus' words are not about having our stomachs filled or our eyes dazzled by divine magic. The words and actions of Jesus are about one thing, our relationship to and journey with God.

Jesus says I am the bread of life. He does not mean he is an eternal loaf. Our world makes the constant mistake of demanding conjuring tricks of him, yet what Jesus wants to be is our strength as we journey to God. we don't celebrate the mass each week because that is the only thing we can do as Christians together. We celebrate Mass to remember the journey we are on and to get the sustenance of Jesus to continue that journey. We are incapable of doing this on our own. As we gather around this altar it is not just bread and wine we receive the enters our body and eventually goes into the drains. It is the life sustaining power of God. This is why we should approach it with due reverence and fear. Why we couch this whole event in prayer and teaching and the reading of scripture. In the most physical and tangible way we engage with the almighty, through Jesus Christ, in the break of bread and sharing of the common cup. In gathering for this common meal, in fellowship and a shared faith in the Lord Jesus, the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit we consume and receive God's grace. As we come now, unlike those long ago travels in the Northern Jordanian desert who shared the bread in the midst of their festival, to receive together God's grace and love; may we follow Jesus' example and command to share that love with others, so that God's love will be know by all we meet and they too may come to share in the broken bread and outpoured wine of his body and blood; knowing for themselves that love that brings salvation, healing and renewal.