

Sunday Morning Worship
Readings, Reflection and Prayers 4th August



Exodus 16.2-4, 9-15

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.'

Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"'

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky

substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

This is the word of the Lord.

Ephesians 4.1-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said,

'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
he gave gifts to his people.'

(When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

This is the word of the Lord.

John 6.24-35

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.' Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'

So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."' Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'

Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

Reflection by Margaret Mandrell

One of my favourite memories of my time in Waterloo, Sierra Leone is when we taught the whole primary school to sing "Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising" and we stood on the classroom balcony with some 850 children in front of us in the school grounds, singing with enthusiasm. One of my saddest recollections is in the nursery school when the children all sang "Thank you for the world so sweet, thank you for the food we eat" and those whose families had nothing to give their children to eat just sat, looking down, knowing that they would be hungry and not eat that day. As a charity, we now try to provide basic food for the children at lunchtime, and give the teachers a sack of rice each term. We receive photographs on WhatsApp and it is humbling to see how such small contributions are so gratefully received.

When Jesus spoke to the crowds, the bread they ate was a crucial part of their daily life. Bread is mentioned throughout the Bible and was made from barley or wheat flour, mixed with water and salt, and baked daily in simple ovens. The words for bread and food are sometimes interchangeable. God promised the Israelites a land where they could eat bread without scarcity, which meant a promise of life. The festival of unleavened bread lay at the heart of Israel's remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. Equally linked with God's protective and providential activity was the provision of manna, the bread from heaven, which fed the Israelites on their long and wearisome journey through the wilderness. Just as bread goes stale and mouldy, so the manna lasted only a day, causing them to rely completely on God for his gracious provision and unfailing care.

The bread that Jesus offered was not what the crowds wanted. They may have been part of the huge gathering who experienced the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, or they may have heard reports of this impressive event. They wanted more, food and entertainment, drama to enliven their hard lives. Some longed for Jesus to become their king who would overthrow the hated Roman oppressors. Some hoped to

witness healing miracles, or to be healed themselves. Jesus acknowledged the importance of bread by quoting the text that man does not live by bread alone, pointing out that the satisfaction of physical needs are not the only requirements for life. He then identified himself as the true bread from heaven that gives life to the world. This was not a crowd pleaser. He offered himself – the bread that lasts forever – to feed the spiritually hungry, and offer them a way to God. This message was a threat to those who were believing Jews, as by saying this, he was making himself equal to God.

At the Last Supper, Jesus interpreted the breaking of the unleavened bread as symbolising the offering of himself as a sacrifice made once for the forgiveness of sins. This symbolic meal has played a central role in worship ever since. This precious sacrament links us all directly with Christ on earth. We can picture this as an unending crowd of believers throughout history and the world, moving from death to life, from darkness to light.

We are fortunate in that we have a wide variety of food to eat, but spiritual hunger is very real and present in society today. We are encouraged by Jesus' words, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." We, as followers of Christ, have hope and joy and a wonderful message to share. We have the gift of salvation, knowing our sins are forgiven, and that we are redeemed and restored. We have the joy of trusting in God who is deeply invested in the life of the world. The Peace of God is offered to each one of us, manifested by inner tranquillity, as we commit all our cares to God. We can be open to the transforming power of God, as his love and care are beyond comprehension. The protection offered to us extends to the core of our being and to our deepest needs. The wholeness and well being which constitute the Peace of God will keep our hearts and minds free from anxiety. May we be hungry for the bread which sustains and gives life, which comes from Jesus, the bread of life.

Prayers

O Lord our God, you give us the true bread
that comes down from heaven,
even your son Jesus Christ our Lord;
hear us now as we offer you our prayers.

To the bidding: Lord hear us
Please respond: **Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord hear us
Lord graciously hear us.

We give you thanks for Holy Communion,
and pray that we may live in Christ as he is in us.
Bless all who minister the sacraments and care for your people.
We pray for all who are being prepared
for confirmation or baptism.
Guide all who are working in mission and outreach.
Silence

Lord hear us
Lord graciously hear us.

Blessed are you Lord God, for you give gifts to your people.
We pray for social workers, carers and home helps,
for all who seek to meet the needs of others
within their community.
We pray for all who live in deserts,
in the barren areas of the world;
and for places where crops are meagre or have failed.
Silence

Lord hear us
Lord graciously hear us.

Lord, giver of all good things,
we give you thanks for all who have provided for us.
We pray for our homes and loved ones,
for all whom we ought to provide;
Lord, that we may be sensitive and caring in our community.

Silence

Lord hear us

Lord graciously hear us.

God of all power and might,
comfort all who have run out of power,
all who lack energy or whose abilities are failing.
We pray for those who are weak through hunger or neglect,
for all who have become ill, and all who care for them.
From our own community we pray especially for:
Leon and Valda Bailey, Joyce Pringle, June Hume, Ann Hunt, Gloria,
Anuwat Wanggane, Joan Tyson, Alan Coe, Jack Tubby, Rob & Lucy,
Roger Jones, Patricia Ash, Jason Thomson, Ryan Day, Brenda Hlland,
David New, and Adrina and Alan Price.

And in a moment now we lift before you those on our own hearts this
morning.

Silence

Lord hear us

Lord graciously hear us.

You are the God who heals and restores.
We give thanks for all who have entered into newness of life in your
kingdom, remembering the recently departed:

And we pray for all who mourn.

We remember with love and gratitude those whose anniversary of death
falls at this time:

June Fisher, Megan Rowe, Jim Adams, George Lawrence, Rowland Humphries, Anne Graham, Peggy Belton, Penny Flockhart and Owen Laws.

And we remember those we love but see no longer.

Silence

Lord hear us

Lord graciously hear us.

Lord God, as we grow increasingly aware
of our spiritual hunger,
we give thanks for the wonder of your provision.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,

our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.