

**A sermon preached at St. Michael & All Angels Church, Sandhurst
on 8th August 2021 by Emma Hodge**

Reading John 6:35 – 51

Theme “Nourished by God”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen

Today we continue our look at the sixth chapter of John's gospel and I don't know if you have noticed, but there has been a theme running through the gospel passages

First we had the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish

Then last week we had one of the famous “I am” statements – “I am the bread of life” and how we need to be sustained by spiritual food.

And this week we continue looking at how God nourishes us with bread, as Jesus says in the last verse of our gospel reading, *“ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”* (Verse 51)

The word bread occurs over 250 times in the bible and played an important part, both in religious life and also domestic life.

We know that the passages from this chapter of John's gospel are set when Jesus was teaching around the sea of Galilee and there were different sizes of towns and villages, each of these would have been made up of different people, with different skills, and occupations,

I want you to imagine that you are a Jewish wife and mother living in one of the smaller villages around the Sea of Galilee at the time of Jesus

As a Jewish person, bread played an important role in your religious life and there are three main times when bread is important for Jews.

Firstly, and fairly well known, is the festival of the unleavened bread, or the Passover, where Jews remember that God instructed Moses to lead the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt to freedom, and they had to leave in a hurry and the bread did not have time to rise.

Secondly, after the Israelites had been freed from slavery and before they entered the promised land, they wandered around the desert and God

provided them with bread, known as manna, from heaven each morning to sustain them for the day.

Thirdly Bread was part of the fellowship offerings¹ that the old testament instructs the Jewish people to make

Bread played an important part in your religious life, and the life of your family, however bread was not just reserved for religious reasons, it was part of your daily meals.

As a wife and mother, part of your daily work would be to ensure that there were meals for your family and bread would have been a regular item on the menu.

Making sure there was bread for meals in first century Galilee was not a case of popping down the local supermarket and picking up a loaf, it would be made each day in homes, and it would have been the women's work to make the bread.

This may have included milling the grain into flour, then the process would have been similar to today's process, mixing it into a dough, leaving it to rise, coming back to it, shaping it, baking it and leaving it to cool before it can be part of the family meal. Making bread is not, nor was then a quick process, it took a large part of your day.

Bread is both a vital element of your domestic and religious life and a lot of your time is spent on the various tasks associated with bread.

You then hear a wondering Rabbi that you have heard things about say that **He is the Bread of Life, and that those who believe in him would never be hungry or thirsty**². He also uses the words to describe himself as I AM a term that is reserved for God and that he came down from heaven to do the work of the person who sent him.

This is not what the rest of the rabbis say. You wonder what it means

You hear other Jews moaning and grumbling. – They wonder how he can say that he came down from heaven - they know his parent's after all!³

Who do you listen to? The moaners - or the wondering Rabbi who provides unusual teaching?

¹ Leviticus 7:12

² John 6:35

³ John 6:42

You decide to reflect on the words that the rabbi spoke “

‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’⁴

As you reflect on these words you know that sustaining people by bread is work and time consuming – you do this every day for you and your family

Does this mean that God is willing to put time and effort into sustaining you and all the people who hear this message?

YES!!!!

This is exactly what it means!

God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit sustains each and every one of us with the spiritual bread of life and this is not just reserved for special occasions or even just once a week, instead it is for each day and we are not limited to just once a day!

This is an amazing gift that we have been given, God sent his Son, Jesus to be the living bread so that we will have life.

But what about us?

How often do we seek the spiritual bread of life to ensure that we are never hungry or thirsty?

It's very easy in our busy lives to put off things we should do, and I know that after a busy day at work, it is sometimes much easier to grab a quick ready prepared meal than spend time preparing a meal from scratch, but is this true of our spiritual lives, do we “get by” on occasional worship, prayer and bible study, or do we spend time throughout each day, regardless of how busy we are, to spend time with God through prayer, to nurture ourselves by reading and studying the bible and by joining with others in worship.

Bread has a religious significance for the Jews however bread has a religious significance for us as Christians,

Each Sunday, when we gather together, we worship God and celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion where we remember the last supper where

⁴ John 6:35

Jesus took bread, broke it and said those words we are familiar with "This is my body broken for you"

Each week, when bread is blessed, it becomes, depending on your view point, the body of Christ and that as Christians we believe that Jesus came, lived and died so that we may live.

As Jesus said in our Gospel reading, all those who believe in Jesus will be raised up on the last day.

Being raised up on the last day, is looking forward to a time when Jesus will come again and as we said earlier in the service "**shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end**"

When John prepares the Altar for communion, due to COVID we won't have an actual bread roll on the altar, however I want you to imagine that the wafer is a bread roll which is being broken for each one of us, and reflect on these words from our Gospel reading

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh⁵

Bread a food that has been around for centuries; a simple food made out of a few simple ingredients; a food that takes time and energy to be made and yet it is a food that is used both in daily life but also has religious meanings.

Will we accept that our lives are nourished by God and are spiritually sustained by Jesus as the living bread?

As Suzanne Toolan put it in one of her hymns

***"The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world and if you eat of this bread you shall live for ever, you shall live for ever
And I will raise you up
And I will raise you up
And I will raise you up on the last day"***

⁵ John 6:51