

I am the bread of life

Sunday 11 July 10

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Readings:

Exodus 16: 1 – 8

Psalm 105: 37 – 41

John 6: 35 – 59

In addition to the oxygen we breathe in order to remain healthy our physical human bodies need:

- Food
- Water
- Light

These are all essential for healthy growth and without food and water our bodies will not survive for very long. I think like many in western society we forget how lucky we are to have food readily available and fresh drinking water available at the turn of a tap in our homes.

But not everyone has such luxuries and every day around 24,000 people die directly from hunger or hunger related diseases and I am sure we are all haunted by the pictures we see of starving children.

In contrast to those images I guess that most of us have 3 meals a day and probably a few snacks in between meals when we are just feeling a bit peckish. Most people will probably drink several cups of tea or coffee or water or soft drinks.

So most of us take care of the physical needs of our bodies – but what about our spiritual needs? Our spiritual side also needs as much, if not more, care than our physical bodies.

It is the spiritual needs of our bodies that we are effectively looking at in this series of sermons on the theme 'Who is Jesus' and in particular looking at the "I am" statements in John's gospel.

In these statements Jesus points us to his unique, divine nature and in essence Jesus is saying, "I the Lord God am here to provide you with everything you need for your spiritual life" and each of these "I am" statements represents a particular aspect of this provision.

Today we are looking at the statement 'I am the bread of life' and the passage we read today occurs the day after Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5000 with nothing more than 5 small barley loaves and two fish. Not only fed 5000 but there were 12 baskets full of pieces left over! (John 6: 1 - 13)

Following the miracle Jesus left the crowd and crossed Lake Galilee during the night, but the next day the crowd catch up with Jesus and he says to them:

"I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. (John 6: 26 – 27)

To which the crowd responded:

"What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (John 6: 30 – 31)

And that is what our reading from Exodus was about. God had rescued the Jewish nation from slavery in Egypt, but rather than be grateful they were forever complaining about their plight in the desert – and God responded with these words:

"I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. ... On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." (Exodus 16: 4 – 5)

Two weeks ago I spoke on Jesus the Messiah. The gospel reading was about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at a well in Samaria.

This woman knew nothing about Jesus other than that he was a thirsty Jew ... but she was to quickly find out that this was no ordinary man. Jesus spoke to her about living water – the water of life but she understood this to literally mean physical water.

In her ignorance she confused the physical and the spiritual. So Jesus pointed out to her that the things of the world only offer temporary satisfaction and so those without Christ will always "thirst again."

The discourse between the crowd and Jesus mirrors that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman – the crowd, like the Samaritan woman, can only think of their physical needs, be that bread or water, whereas Jesus is talking about their spiritual needs.

but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." (John 16: 32 – 34)

Compare this with the words of the Samaritan woman:

"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." (John 4: 15)

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6: 35)

That life giving statement of Jesus' was the one that caused the crowd to grumble just like their forefathers had done in the desert all those years earlier!

This was a great stumbling block to the people for many of them knew Jesus, knew his family, knew his background, knew he was a carpenter – so how could he possibly be able to say that ‘he came down from heaven’?

They missed what their own Scriptures had prophesied in Isaiah 7:14:

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

The problem was yes they did want the bread Jesus offered but only so that it would make their lives easier – if they got bread free they would not have to work so hard to earn money to feed themselves and their families!

In the same way that bread supplies our bodies with strength and nourishment, Jesus, the true bread from heaven, had come to strengthen and nourish his people - to change their lives, to bring spiritual and eternal life to all who would believe in him!

Jesus offers people the ultimate **spiritual** satisfaction: If we believe in him, spiritually we will never hunger or thirst. But that does not mean we escape the inherent problems of life here on earth, we are not immune from the frailties of our temporary human bodies.

As a hospital chaplaincy volunteer I have often heard people, including committed Christians, ask ‘Why am I suffering like this I’ve haven’t done anything wrong I’ve been good all my life, treated others well, etc’. It is particularly sad to hear so called committed Christians saying things like this because it shows they have completely misinterpreted the gospel message.

Jesus warned his disciples of troubles ahead:

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16: 33)

For Jesus to say he is the ‘Bread of Life’ he is effectively saying, “I am the sustenance of your life.” It is a life-giving role - for he is the only source of eternal life. No one else but Jesus is the Bread that gives eternal life, there is no other way to achieve eternal life except to accept Jesus Christ and take the bread he offers.

It isn’t a once and for all action, but an ongoing one – just as we need to physically feed our bodies with food regularly so we need to continue to feed our spiritual body.

When we accept the bread offered by Jesus we inherit eternal life, it is a life-changing event but it is only the start of a new life in Jesus, for it is a life-long learning process. So we need to continue to feed from Jesus in order to grow in Christ and live the sort of life Christ expects from his followers.

How do we do this? By regular attendance at church where we can meet and learn from fellow Christians; through regular reading and study of the bible together

with regular prayer. These are the key ingredients to spiritual satisfaction and growth so as to get the full benefit of the bread of life Christ offers.

If when we come to church it is the only time:

- We meet with Christ
- We meet with fellow Christians
- We read and study our bibles
- We pray.

Then I suggest we are not getting enough spiritual food for the healthy growth of our spiritual lives. In order to correct this we need to make church attendance a priority – not something we do if there is nothing better to do, we need to meet with fellow Christians, we need to read our bible regularly and we need to pray regularly.

We provide opportunities for all of these:

- Homegroups
- Bible reading notes for all ages and abilities
- Prayer
 - opportunities after our morning services
 - meetings – or if you prefer to pray at home,
 - prayer items are listed on the service sheet
 - prayer diaries are available to enable you to pray for fellow church members
 - 'prayer chain', especially for urgent prayer needs.

In making both hospital chaplaincy visits and funeral visits people often feel obliged to apologise for not going to church with a variety of responses:

- Church is for young people, I heard this once from someone in intensive care – less than 48 hours later he died.
- Church is for old people – I recently took the funeral of a 22yr old student whose bright future was cut short by a brain haemorrhage.

Both views are equally wrong! Church is for all ages - young and old alike. Remember the parable of the rich fool who tore down his barns and built bigger ones to accommodate all his grain and goods saying to himself:

"You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12: 19 – 20)

Tomorrow maybe too late – we need to accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour now whilst we have the chance ... for he is 'the bread of life' that gives eternal life.