

DATE: Sunday August 1, 2021

CHURCH: St Matthew's Kensington

BIBLE PASSAGE: John 6:24-35

GENERAL THEME/TOPIC: Bread of life

Buying a loaf of bread used to be simple. The choice was between white bread and brown bread. But buying a loaf of bread these days is complicated – square or high-top; thick sliced or thin; sandwich loaf; whole grain, multi-seeds; Vienna loaf; fruit loaf – it's complicated.

But bread is bread despite its many shapes and forms and in Jesus' day it was usually flat bread, like our pita bread.

When Jesus fed the crowd of 5,000 people with the young boy's packed lunch of barley loaves and fish, the bread was a bit special. Barley grain, and probably risen with yeast. Jesus had taken what was ordinary, commonplace and usual and had made it extraordinary, unique and unusual. 5,000 people fed with five barley bread-buns and a couple of cured fish.

It's no wonder the crowd got into boats, crossed the lake to Capernaum, and found Jesus there. In their eyes he was a wonderworker. This man could feed them. Jesus recognised this and said (John 6:27, 28) "Don't work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you; for on him God the Father has set his seal." It was as though Jesus had said, "You seek me because I dealt with your physical hunger with physical bread. But what about your spiritual hunger? What about the food that endures to spiritual eternal life?"

This spiritual hunger remains today and is real. So is physical hunger in many parts of the world. Thank God for the human agencies that work to alleviate physical hunger.

But alleviating spiritual hunger – the distribution of the bread of life, That's the work that God has entrusted to you and me, because we are Jesus' followers. When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are praying that we may have each day what we need physically for each day - enough food, enough shelter, enough love. But at a deeper level we are also praying that we may have what we need to satisfy and nourish our spiritual selves. And what is that? Knowledge of the Bible **and** how to apply it **and** how to live it. Fellowship with other Christians, giving and receiving friendship, help and affirmations. Meaningful worship where we lift up our hearts and emotions to God in thanks and adoration.

Seeing the lived example of godliness and goodness in others' lives.

All this, and more, is bread for our spiritual nourishment when we pray "give us this day our daily bread."

In a country like Australia, it's very easy to be a Christian. We have no overt persecution; we have freedom of worship; we have opportunity to carry out deeds of Christian compassion; we have freedom of speech and of expression.

But in a country like Australia, we also have increasing secularism, increasing lack of care about spiritual matters. Our task as Jesus' followers is to distribute Jesus as the bread of life is great.

Those people who sailed to Capernaum to look for Jesus asked him for a sign – the sort of sign that their historical hero Moses had provided in the Old Testament days, when they ate that strange manna-stuff in the wilderness. And over there on the other shore of the lake, Jesus had provided for the large crowd so that they were eating barley-bread in the wilderness. Surely this was a re-enactment of Moses' feeding the wandering Israelites with manna ... Moses gave them a "sign" – Jesus had also given those Capernaum people the sign that they were asking for.

The sign that Moses gave to the wandering Israelites was the sign of God's care for them – of food. Jesus takes the reference to the manna, and extends it. "I am the manna – I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:35) Here there are shades of the woman of Samaria at the well, when Jesus had said to her in John 4:14, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give them will never thirst ... it will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." So we have both the bread of life, and the water of eternal life.

There is such a challenge here for us Christians today – to share the bread of life we have fed on, and to share the water welling up to eternal life that we have been refreshed by. The very quality of our lives bears testimony to our spiritual diet of the bread of life and the water of eternal life.

People may not be prepared to listen to our words, but they will certainly be observing our lives and behaviour – in our relationships at home; in our business lives; in our speaking to each other and about each other, and the way we speak; in our attitudes of grace and care for each other; in our communal life as a community of Jesus' followers.

We have tasted, and fed upon, and been nourished by the bread of life; we have tasted and been refreshed by the water of eternal life – all from Jesus who loves us, feeds us and refreshes us. Our challenge ... our task ... our mission ... is to offer that bread and water to others just as Jesus did to the 5,000 and to the woman at the well. Our challenge, our task and our mission is not to put obstructions in the way of others by being unloving, uncaring, ungenerous in our deeds, words and attitudes.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; those who come to me shall never hunger, and those who believe in me shall never thirst." (John 6:35). Let us be faithful bread distributors, so that everyone may come and find Christ's eternal life. (962 words)