

Sermon Trinity 9

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15, Ephesians 4:17, 20-24, John 6:24-35

Now, I don't know about you, but I'm pretty sure I could live on bread. Any one of you who saw me grow up knows bread was all I ate at church parties.

Today we hear one of Jesus's most famous statements, well, certainly most quotable. I am the bread of life. This is the first of several times in John's gospel that the phrase 'I am' is used to make a statement. As ever with John's gospel, we must remember the purpose for which John is writing. He writes 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,' and says as much later in his gospel. These I AM statements connect Christ to God, as in the Old Testament. I AM is the personal name God uses with the Israelites.

When Jesus uses this phrase he is often telling us something about himself, whilst subtly informing us who he truly is. God. Another consideration is that this story seems to link itself to the story of Jesus and the Woman at the well, in which Jesus tells the woman that anyone who drinks the living water will never be thirsty again. John seems to always be challenging us with the question of Who Jesus is, and what this means in our lives. What do we do with the word of Jesus? How can his teachings impact our daily lives? These are the questions I will try to explore.

But first let us consider what bread is. We all know what bread is. We've all eaten what my mother refers to as 'duck bread' and some of us may have encountered other types from the numerous local bakeries. Bread is hearty and it can be eaten plain, with butter or in a myriad of other ways. It can be as simple as just flour and water, though that won't taste great, or a complex scientific process that Paul Hollywood would approve of. It is just so with Jesus, and I think this might be what John is trying to say. A sustaining relationship with Jesus can be as simple as you like, for he will always be with you, but this relationship can be invigorated with prayer. There are many types of prayer that you can choose to explore, just as there are many seasonings and condiments for bread. Bread can be eaten by itself, but also with all the trimmings. However you like your bread is best for you. Toasted, Buttered, Jammed or with Marmite. However you, or

I relate and engage with this relationship best. There are many church mothers and fathers who have pursued this end. Many have written their own helpful prayer exercises, such as St. Ignatius, whom I find particularly helpful, but there are many others which may help deepen and strengthen one's relationship with Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit.

All this talk of bread will remind us of Manna, the sustaining wafers that tasted like honey from Exodus and Numbers. The Jewish Midrash says, it tasted like the exact food that each person needed at that moment, which sounds amazing. An all you can eat buffet every morning of Mana which tasted exactly like you wanted it to? Count me in! It must be said however, that the bible is more specific, and says raw manna tasted like wafers made with honey. Whatever the case, the Mana came straight from heaven by divine grace and goodness. It is a sign of favour, of God choosing to help the Israelites. Manna rained down from heaven just like Jesus has come down to sustain us. In this way, it could be considered that Jesus echoes the history of the Israelites, by coming to sustain like the manna did.

The Holy Eucharist uses bread and wine to bring us close to God. The Church of England says that the bread may be leavened or unleavened. But our canons are specific, that it must be the best, and purest wheat flour that conveniently may be gotten. Evidently choice and quality of bread is an important thing. For such a Holy act we need the very best. Likewise we wear the very best vestments for the same reason. However I've also spoken to Vicars, on the subject, who said that communion must be the bread of the people, because Christ is with us in all aspects of our lives, and if everyone in the parish uses naan, pitta or tortillas at home that is what should be used in their spiritual home.

For me the communion wafer that we at St. Margarets use is, more or less, what I imagine mana to be, as Mana is often described as like wafers. This made me stop and think about the Eucharist and its power. Jesus comes to us, interacts with us every Sunday in a form not unlike mana.

But what does all this mean? In real terms, Jesus is telling us we need him. Jesus is the bread of life, the sustenance, and the enricher of our lives. We are not satisfied spiritually unless we know Jesus. Knowledge of and relationship with Christ is paramount. If we do not eat the bread how can we hope to be sustained? If the Israelites had shunned the manna they

would have died in the wilderness. "It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'" So let's listen. Let's stop eating our own bread, and start eating the bread of life. Continue to strengthen our relationship with Christ. We cannot live good and rich lives without a relationship with Christ Jesus. This relationship is a gift that anyone can access, an enrichment everyone can have. Jesus tells us that we will never go hungry. So let's listen, and strengthen our relationship with the one who saves us from hunger and thirst.

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