



Reading: John 6: 35, 41-51

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.

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

Call to Worship

Jesus is the Bread of Heaven for eternal life. In this time of worship, may we find his sustenance and strength, and by the leading of the Holy Spirit, may we come ready to receive from Father God. Let our hearts and minds resolve to offer him thanks and praise. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. © A Rocha

Hymn: StF 465 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j48TLIRb4Q>

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,

be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
and me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams (1717–1791)
translated by Peter Williams (1727–1796)

Prayer - *Bread of Heaven, feed me now and evermore.*

Lord, Jesus,

We thank you that you are the living bread, sent to satisfy the spiritual hunger of the world but more than that, we thank you that you are OUR living bread, now and for all eternity.

We thank you for those promises contained within the reading we heard earlier.

We give thanks that you that you draw us to your Father God whilst at the same time the Father, through the Holy Spirit, is drawing us to you. Our faith is initiated, grown and held within the ever-faithful hands of the whole Trinity and we thank you for that.

We thank you for the promise that on the last day we shall be raised up and we will live for ever because of you and that all that is made possible because you gave up your earthly body for the life of the world. You are, indeed, living bread broken for us.

But we also remember the opening words of the reading and how people were prepared to turn their backs on you despite the claims you made about yourself. We confess that, in our lives, there are times when the same thing happens with us. Most of the time it happens without us really realising. We slip into our human abilities and instincts to such an extent that we effectively shut you out. Forgive us for those times but also for when we turn our back on you through deliberate intention; when you challenge us on our walk of discipleship and we do not want to listen. Forgive us our sins; help us to do the right thing, if it is possible, to right any wrong or hurt we have caused to others; and set us back on your right paths for the future.

Let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.

Lead us all our journeys through – you who are our strength and shield and our strong deliverer.

And, Father God, we thank you for sending us living bread in the person of Jesus. We thank and praise you for that bigger picture of love and forgiveness and daily care for the whole world and your thread of love running through the whole of history, including this part in which we find ourselves here in the twenty-first century.

In our reading it said, *'It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God."'* May that be true for us today. Draw us closer to you and closer to your purposes.

Amen.

Readings: 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 and Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Hymn: Living Hope

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f2FXxDVO6w>

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke Your name into the night
Then through the darkness
Your loving kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The king of kings calls me His own
Beautiful saviour, I'm Yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope
Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name

Jesus Christ, my living hope

Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the roaring lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the roaring lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
Jesus, Your's is the victory

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope
Jesus Christ, my living hope
Oh God, You are my living hope

Songwriters: Brian Johnson / Phil Wickham
© Be Essential Songs, Bethel Music Publishing

Message:

I find etymology fascinating. Etymology is the study of words and, in particular, the study of the derivation of words. What journey has a word taken to come to its present meaning? What ideas or word pictures might be associated with it? Take the English word 'Lord' for example. We instinctively know what it means? It relates to a very important person. We have the House of Lords in our parliamentary system which for a long time consisted of religious high ups and landed gentry. People whom the likes of you and me were taught to look up to. Roman Emperors were called Lord, although in Greek rather than English (Kurios to be precise), and we know that Lord is a word associated many times in the Bible with God. So, we've got a picture of what that word means but from where in our English language does our word 'Lord' emerge?

The answer to that question might surprise you. We need to go back to two words in the language of the Anglo Saxons. One is the word 'hlaef' which became the word we know today as loaf. It, therefore, has to do with bread. The other is 'weard' or ward which meant something like 'keeper'. Thus, the lord or the 'loaf-ward' meant 'keeper of the bread' and, as an idea, the one who provided bread and sustenance for those under and around him. Incidentally, the word 'lady' also derives from that same Anglo-Saxon source. Alongside the lord who provides bread is the 'lady' who kneads or makes the bread.

It gives us a fascinating insight into today's reading where Jesus describes himself as the living bread come down from Heaven. Who has sent that bread? The Lord God. God is the one who has sent Jesus. God is the one who in Jesus provides the spiritual bread that will bring us to eternal life. It also gives us a fascinating perspective on the Lord's Prayer where Jesus taught us to pray to the Lord God that we might be provided with bread and sustenance on a daily basis. Of course, he was speaking in Aramaic rather than English but the same idea is there.

This idea of a lord, as somebody you look up to for provision rather than somebody you just look up to, is a million miles away from our Old Testament reading. It's a passage that ends with the gut-wrenching sight of King David mourning his dead son. 'If only it could have been me', he cries out in anguish.

How did we get to this point? If you were following last week's Old Testament passage from the lectionary, we were dealing with the fallout from David's affair with Bathsheba and his killing of her husband, Uriah. There, the prophet Nathan took David to account and declared that, because of David's violent actions, violence would never be far from his family. The death of Absalom is just one example of that prophecy coming to pass. Absalom has initiated a revolt against his father and declared himself king. As we have seen from the reading, that rebellion turned out to be short-lived and Absalom was soon dead.

What was the attraction for Absalom, or anyone else for that matter, to launch a rebellion? Why were kings and rulers, until comparatively recent times, always having to look over their shoulders trying to predict from where challenges to their rule might come? That answer lies in the power and privilege that went with being a ruler. You had absolute power. You were above the law and could do whatever you wanted. That meant you could live in luxury and amass riches for yourself and those close to you. The story of David and Bathsheba wouldn't have surprised people from other nations. They would have assumed that the king had the absolute right to take another man's wife and to have whoever he liked put to death. The surprise, therefore, wasn't in what David did but that God called him out for it. As we said, this is a million miles from the concept of a lord as one who is the keeper or provider of bread. For most people, across most of history, kings and rulers have been seen as ones who take, not as ones who give.

In our reading from Ephesians, we are taught that as Christians we too should be givers rather than takers. We should be ones who add positivity rather than negativity to the world around us. We are called:

- To speak truth to our neighbours rather than untruths;
- To be properly angry when we need to be but not to let that lead us into wrongdoing;
- To live honestly, not taking what isn't ours, but trying to put ourselves in a position where we can give to others and support those in need;
- To use our words, our speech, to build up others rather than to tear them down;
- Out should go bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, malice and slander;
- In should come kindness to one another, compassion and forgiveness;

We are called to take up all that gives to the world and to lay down all that takes from it.

And the justification for this is made very clear as we move into Ephesians 5.

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

We are called to be imitators of God, the Lord, the one who provides for the needs of the world both spiritually and materially – the one who provides bread for the world. And we are called to be imitators of Jesus. It describes his life as being like a fragrant offering, something that was offered to God self-sacrificially and that brought a sweet smell to the air. Jesus, it says, loved us humans and put our interests before his own. He gave us a model by which to live our lives, Now, we need to go and do the same.

Hymn: StF 325 Jesus Christ, Perfect Love Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=4yqvwajf13E>

Jesus Christ perfect love

Holy One that knows no fault

Screen my thoughts.; Make me clean

Know the motives of my heart

When I see my selfish choice

When I glimpse your holiness

Then I realise again

Perfect Love has come to cleanse

Jesus Christ - Lamb of God

Love resolved to take our place

Who can write or describe

All of your self-giving grace

When I look at the brutal cross

Innocence and beauty slain

That's when I realise once more

You fully understand our pain

Jesus Christ - Lord for all

Plant in me the kingdom seed

Search me Lord, when I'm found

Looking only to my needs

When I see the way you lived

How you dignified the poor

Then I realise again

How I need to know you more

Jesus Christ - King of heaven

Qualified to wear the crown

In your face radiant grace

Draws us closer to your throne

When we see your generous heart

When we touch the world you love

That's when we realise again

Perfect Love is Perfect Hope

Geraldine Latty/ Mike Busbee © 2005 Thankyou Music/The Livingstone Collective

Prayer

As we have seen in our reading from Ephesians, Christians are called to bring positivity and not negativity to the world around them. We do that in partnership with God's Holy Spirit.

We are called to bring:

- Truth
- Righteous anger
- Constructive speech
- Help for the needy
- Kindness
- Compassion and forgiveness

Bring to mind situations both close to home and around the world. Pray for each of those situations that God, through the presence of his people, may be able to bring comfort, challenge and change in whatever measure it is needed and for the work of the Holy Spirit, hovering over chaos and disorder, bringing God's peace and healing.

Father God, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The Lord's Prayer : Our Father, who art in heaven

Hymn: STF 615 Let love be real, in giving and receiving Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZUo4gGaq2c>

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,

without the need to manage and to own;

a haven free from posing and pretending,

where every weakness may be safely known.

Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,

give me your love wherever we may go:

as God loves us, so let us love each other,

with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

give me your love in spite of all you know:

as God loves us, so let us love each other,

with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Let love be real, with no manipulation,

no secret wish to harness or control;

let us accept each other's incompleteness,

and share the joy of learning to be whole.

Give me your hope through dreams and

disappointments,

give me your trust when all my failings show:

as God loves us, so let us love each other,

with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,

that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;

that helps us face the risk of truly living,

and makes us brave to be what we might be.

Give me your strength when all my words are weakness,

Michael Forster © Kevin Mayhew Ltd., (Publishers)
Buxhall, Stowmarket