

Sermon 5 August 2018 Jesus, the bread of life.

John 6:29-35

This exchange between Jesus and the people in which Jesus makes the statement, the claim that he is the bread of life, takes place the day after the feeding of the five thousand. As we well know, that miracle involved, as well as two fish, five loaves of bread. And so there is a direct link here. And in fact, Jesus is taking the message behind the feeding of the five thousand and building on it. He is actually affirming that message.

So firstly, what is the message behind the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand? But before we examine that, let me just reiterate a point I have made before that the truth of any story in the Bible lies in the message. Do you have a problem getting your head around this miracle? I do. So we ask ourselves, what is the message here? Because therein lies the truth.

The message, quite simply, is that Jesus can nourish us, in a way that bread does, but of course, Jesus takes it much further than that. It is undoubtedly a brilliant analogy because it is so simple and straight forward and yet contains profound meaning.

We all have a hunger. Yes, we have a hunger for food as embodied in this loaf of bread. But we have a hunger for something far more meaningful than food. To put it in a nutshell, we have a hunger for love. William Blake wrote, 'Where love is concerned our hearts are a bottomless gorge.' We need to be loved, to be respected, valued and affirmed – that's what love is, and that's what makes us feel good about life and ourselves. That's what gives us our feeling of self-worth and without that we are unable to function effectively.

So what has this got to do with Jesus? When we take Jesus on board in our lives, we take on board everything he stands for – his example, his lessons, his values. We attempt to imbue our lives with all that is good, with all that is right and proper, with all the elements of love. Because that is what he stood for and that is what he challenges us to do.

Jesus took the Ten Commandments which are God's rules for life and which are difficult to question or challenge, no matter what your faith, and he condensed them into two simple directives – love God and love your neighbour. Simple but brilliant, but then that is the mark of the man.

The beauty of these two directives is that one leads to the other. Through faith in God we receive the strength, the motivation and the ability to love one another. How do we do that?

We reach out to others. We respect, value and affirm one another. Simple? In theory, yes, but actually not easy to do, not consistently. That's why we need to seek God's assistance in enabling us to put this into practice.

And what are the implications? The benefits are actually substantial. The more this can be put into practice, the greater the flow-on effects for everyone. The more we are being loved, the better we will feel. The more we are able to convey love to others, the better we will feel ourselves. I don't think I can put it any simpler than that.

There are innumerable ways we can convey love. We have talked about giving our time, about listening. Let me conclude by touching on one other, and as I do, just to remind ourselves that love in the Christian sense is not necessarily a deep and strong feeling or emotion between two people. It is just as much a feeling of care, respect and affirmation.

Praise. How often each day do we praise or compliment? I suspect not enough. As with listening, we are not that good at it. As with listening, we have to work at it. And there are reasons for that which we cannot explore right now.

When someone praises us, compliments us, we feel a million dollars. A compliment can sustain us for days! So let's do it for others, regularly. 'Let your conversation be gracious and effective...'

Colossians 4:4

Let me finish by telling you a story, a true story. A couple were celebrating their Golden Wedding anniversary. The husband was asked what the secret was to his successful marriage. The old man answered with this story.

His wife, Sarah, was the only girl he ever dated. He grew up in an orphanage and worked hard for everything he had. He never had time to date until Sarah swept him off his feet. Before he knew it, she had managed to get him to ask her to marry him.

After their wedding service, Sarah's father took the new groom aside and handed him a small gift. He said, 'Within this gift is all you need to know to have a happy marriage.' The nervous young man fumbled with the paper and the ribbon until he got the package unwrapped.

Within the box lay a large gold watch. With great care he picked it up. Upon close examination he saw etched across the face of the watch a prudent reminder he would see whenever he checked the time of day, words that if heeded, held the secret to a successful marriage. They were, 'Say something nice to Sarah.'

Jesus is the bread of life because he brings us the recipe and the power for making each other feel good, to feel nourished and fulfilled.

Rev Warner Wilder