

## Sermon 1 August 2021 Jesus the bread of life

### 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 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 feeding of the five thousand? 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 straightforward and yet contains profound meaning. I guess that is the mark of all the analogies and stories Jesus uses to teach.

#### *Importance of bread to us*

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 have a need to be respected, valued and affirmed – that's what love is, and that's what makes us feel good about ourselves and about life. That's what gives us our feeling of self-worth and without that we are unable to function effectively.

I refer you to the last verse in that wonderful and very well-known passage we heard from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. *'If I do not have love, I am nothing.'* I don't think that could be put more plainly. If every single young person received full and unconditional love, crime statistics would take a big hit. If every single person received full and unconditional love, we wouldn't necessarily solve the issue of mental health but we would certainly make some inroads. There is no question that with the expression of love in our lives, we are able to fully express our potential, to not only ride out the storms of life but also to show our true worth.

So what has this got to do with Jesus? When we take Jesus on board in our lives, we take in 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 stands for and that is what he challenges us to do. *'I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you.'* John 15:12.

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 that easy to do, not consistently. That is why we need God's assistance in enabling us to put this into practice. There are times when we certainly do need that strength and motivation to carry out this love.

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 simpler than that.

There are innumerable ways we can convey love. We have talked about giving our time, about listening. Let me touch on another, and as I do, just to remind ourselves that love in the Christian sense is about a feeling of care, respect and affirmation.

Praise. How often each day do we praise or compliment? I suspect not enough. As with listening, most of us are 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 good. 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 give you a very simple example. *Supermarket checkout*

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.

After their wedding service, the father of his wife, Sarah, took him 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 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. The words 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.

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