



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

Reading John 6:25-36.

Sermon: 16 August 2009

The text for the sermon verses 35 & 36:

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ¹

Jesus says in this passage He is telling them the truth - He is the bread of life

People living in the remote areas of this world of ours understand this passage clearer than we do understand it at times. To them bread really means survival from hunger and starvation. Bread for them is life. And I think to the people of the Mediterranean world Jesus lived in, it was the same. Jesus is telling them He is there choice for life rather than death and (spiritual) starvation.

John continues this passage after he reported in verses 1-14 of the very big miracle that took place. 5000 people were fed on the other side of the Lake of Galilee. It is worth noting that John is the only one in the whole of the New Testament that calls the lake Tiberias, as it was called in later Roman times. It became known as the Sea of Tiberias following the completion by Herod Antipas in the year 20 AD of the city with that same name on the west shore. The city was so named in honor of the Roman emperor, the patron of Antipas.

John mentions that it happened just before the Passover festival that happened in their springtime. Jesus took 5 loaves of Barley bread and the two fishes and shared them with everyone. Barley bread was the bread of the poor people. The biggest wonder of course happened after everyone was fed – there were still twelve baskets full of leftover bread!

The people could not believe what happened. They did not realise that Jesus was the Messiah. They thought he was just a great prophet. Not long after this their thoughts changed. Maybe he would be the next great king who would liberate them from the Roman rule. Actually John is saying they wanted to proclaim Jesus as their king by force! But off course this was not Jesus' true mission.

So Jesus retreated. Then John tells us that the disciples went down to the lake, got into the boat and went across the Lake towards Capernaum. Jesus didn't go with them at first. He joined them later by walking on the water during a storm. The storm faded when Jesus climbed into the boat and they reached the shore safely. Another wonder!

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Jn 6:35-36

But the crowd Jesus fed did not know of all that happened the previous night. They realised Jesus was gone and could not understand where Jesus was because he did not leave with his disciples in their boat the previous night.

So they started frantically looking for him and found him on the other side of the Lake. They asked him when He got there and not HOW he got there. Maybe this is a glimpse into their true intentions. They didn't really care about Jesus. They just asked because they had to say something! It is also clear that when they address Jesus as "rabbi" that their expectations of Jesus as prophet and king have changed during the course of Jesus' disappearance.

Jesus did not answer them directly. He answers them by exposing their true motifs for seeking him. Jesus saw in their behaviour their need to be fed without prayer or hard labour. They didn't come to Jesus because they believed in him as their true saviour. They came to him for their temporal needs. Jesus is telling them to focus on another need – their spiritual needs that come from God alone. God chose Jesus as his representative on earth to save humanity. They must believe in Him alone. Their motifs were selfish and not of faith and love!

Jesus says to them He is the bread of life. He can fulfil all their needs. He is the one who gives eternal life, the food that does not perish. If they come to him in faith they will never feel the hunger of starvation. If they believe in him they will never be thirsty again.

It is quite ironic that Jesus who was born in Bethlehem says He is the bread of life since Bethlehem translated from the Hebrew literally means "place/house of bread".

But still the people did not understand Jesus' true mission and calling. They did not understand that Jesus was sent by God to save them from a spiritual starvation and death! He did not come only to fulfil their temporal needs but to address their real need to be saved from sin, death, and hell. In this passage Jesus spoke of their eternal need while they were only concerned with earthly provision and prosperity.

What does it mean for us today?

We live in a consumer society, in a very materialistic world where we think every need can be answered too through money and wealth. Yes in our society you can even buy children!

But amidst all these wealth the people of our world does not seem to be happy. It is as if people are racing to satisfy every temporal need but still are hungry for peace, love, hope, and acceptance.

As Christians we can also fall for the temporal solutions our world offers us to have peace, happiness, and love to find out it does not really mean anything. We can also run like our world to find hope, peace, love and happiness in all the wrong places such as brothels, alcohol, drugs. We can eat as many of our earthly bread as possible but still be left with an empty spot in our tummies. In the long run nothing can give us the spiritual love, hope, peace, and happiness that last forever except our faith in Jesus Christ, the real bread of life.

We often realise this when we are sick, lonely, depressed. It is then that we feel that without God's presence we are utterly lost, it is then that we realise that something's in life cannot be bought with money. It is then that we realise that the true bread namely our faith is all we need to survive the onslaughts of our lives on earth. Jesus promises us if we come to him we will never be spiritually hungry again for love, peace, faith, hope, and happiness. If we believe in Him we will have no need to go to any other place.

God provided for us bread namely Jesus Christ. As Christians we have a responsibility to share the heavenly bread that we received from God with our world. We have ample opportunity. The yearly Edinburgh Festival started on Friday. There will be a lot of people surrounding us from all parts of the world when we attend the festival.

Let us show them with our lives of faith hope and love that Jesus has fulfilled all our needs. Let us tell them by our example that the solutions our world offers is only temporal but that Jesus is our only answer to eternal happiness and peace!

Let us all go out of this church this morning and stop focussing on supplying our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and friends with earthly bread alone but let us show them with our lives the heavenly bread that we received in Jesus Christ. The bread that we receive through faith alone!

Amen

Readings of the week

John 6:51-58

In the readings from John 6:1-50 we have seen the unfolding of Jesus' understanding of himself as the bread of life, not just in a symbolic way, but in the flesh. We have also seen the desire of the crowd to keep the discourse about real (in their terms) bread so that Jesus would repeat his sign of feeding them. Now they were discussing how anyone could give their flesh to be eaten (V. 52). It was probably a heated discussion. What did Jesus mean exactly? Was this cannibalism — a charge frequently leveled against Christianity? As people familiar with the Lord's Supper, Communion or Eucharist, we may be so familiar with the idea of eating the body of Christ that we find it difficult to understand how offensive this might sound to others. Jesus re-emphasises his claim to be the bread from heaven. Everyday bread has life-giving properties and the only way to get that nourishment is to eat the bread. In the same way, the only way to receive the life-giving potential of the bread from heaven was to eat.

A Prayer for wisdom

Make us wise enough
to enter your house,
to sit at your table
and feast in your company.

Make us simple enough to listen to your call,
yet mature enough to walk in the way of insight.

O wise God,
help us to draw near to you.

Amen.