

## I am the bread of life

9 8 09

Lord of all power and might,  
the author and giver of all good things,  
graft in our hearts the love of your name,  
increase in us true religion,  
nourish us with all goodness  
and of your great mercy keep us in the same.

My text may be found in today's gospel from John, 'I am the bread of life' (6 v35)

How many times do you have to say something for someone to hear? I guess the answer depends on whether or not the person you're talking to is listening to you in the first place. When I was a teacher, part of the trick in teaching a successful lesson was to tell the pupils what you were going to teach them; teach it to them; then remind them of what they just learnt: a classic three part lesson! In today's passage from John chapter 6, the third in three weeks and all of which stem from the miracle of 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand', we can find John writing the same thing not once, not twice, not three times but four! Surely a record in just 15 verses! In verse 35, he says 'I am the bread of life.' In verse 41, 'I am the bread come down from heaven'. In verse 48, 'I am the bread of life'. In verse 51, 'I am the living bread'. I think you would have to be fairly inattentive to miss the exciting point John is making about the man who made five small loaves stretch

to feed some 5,000 adults – namely that Jesus is the Son of God who has come down from heaven in order to feed his people; in short, Jesus is the bread of life.

Okay – then Jesus is the bread of life but what does that mean? Obviously the truth of the statement, I am the bread of life, is not a literal truth since as Christians we believe that Jesus is fully what it is to be a man and however well bred he was, he is not literally a loaf! The truth, then, is figurative; bread in this context is an image to suggest an insight into something of the peculiar nature of what Jesus is since we believe not only is he fully what it is to be a man but that he is also fully what it is to be God. Bread is a common staple food: it is one of the essential basic ingredients to sustain life. It is this life–sustaining property of bread that is at the heart of the image – I am the bread of life – that by eating what Jesus has to offer, we will be sustained in the life which God has given us. Jesus is the Word of God and by giving us God’s word he is literally feeding the inner man, he is giving us the words of life which enable us to live a spiritually and morally aware life. He is literally giving us something of himself, his being, his very essence in his teaching. Therefore, I can conclude with reasonable certainty that when Jesus speaks of himself as the bread of life, what he is saying to us is that by virtue of who and what he is, his teaching will sustain us not only in this life but in the life to come!

That said, it is salutary to consider the reaction to the crowd to Jesus over the last three weeks in this chapter of John. After they had literally been fed by Jesus, they wanted to take him off by force and make him their king. Is it not the dream of every hungry man to have a leader who promises to satisfy their ever–present

hunger? This unwelcome fate Jesus narrowly avoids setting out across the Lake by boat. Last week, we then saw the crowd pursuing him round the Lake in the hope of a second free meal but they are to be disappointed in their expectation when Jesus challenges them to look for real spiritual bread instead of just everyday bread that at the end of the day will go stale. And today, the opposition hardens as they belittle Jesus, doubting his claim to heavenly origins because in a relatively small Jewish community that existed in Galilee, they knew or knew of his mother and father, his brothers and sisters. Disappointed in Jesus' unwillingness to feed their stomachs, unimpressed with his promise to feed their minds and souls, they grumble about Jesus and start to nit-pick. How easy is it for a popular politician to lose his popularity when he fails to satisfy the crowd's expectations of him!

So we can see today that in chapter 6 of his gospel John is very keen to impress on us the spiritual truth of Jesus being the bread of life. We have seen what this image might mean for us: that through his teaching, through the words of eternal life, we can be fed not only in this life but in the life to come. Finally we have seen how fickle a crowd of people can be when they don't get what they want and through their discontent can miss the content of what God is offering them.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, amen.

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H: Sermon 20: Bread of life

