



Readings, Reflection & Prayers
Tenth Sunday after Trinity
8 August 2021



StJohnsAL5

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Readings for this Sunday

These are the readings for this Sunday which you may like to read in your bibles at home.

1 Kings 19: 4-8

Psalm 34: 1-8

Ephesians 4: 25-5:2

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.'

Reflection by Anne Edwards

Last Sunday Canon Kevin Walton asked: “What about my spiritual lack? How do I notice that? What would my life be like if I stopped believing? Or if I starved that belief of substance?” And then he went on: “Is Jesus really the bread of my life, or the icing on the cake?”

I wonder if you have spent any time pondering on these questions, and if so what has been the result of your ponderings, because this week’s reading from chapter 6 of John’s Gospel returns to Jesus’ statement that he is the bread of life.

John’s Gospel contains the seven ‘I am’ statements that Jesus made, each of them giving us a picture of who he is. Bread was the all-important commodity of the ancient Near East. It often replaced money in commerce. Everyone ate it, every day. Life was inconceivable without it. And today we come to Jesus’ statement “I am the bread of life”. The Jewish people recognised that these ‘I am’ statements referred them back to God’s description of himself to Moses: “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14).

Only nine of the 39 books in the Old Testament do not refer to bread. It is frequently mentioned in the Gospels and in Acts, and the Feast of Weeks, a celebration of the wheat harvest, was one of the most popular of the year.

So much of Jewish life was bound up with bread, and Jesus would have had in mind the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the two great founding feasts of Judaism, both feasts instituted by God himself on the night before he led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. (See Exodus chapters 12 and 13)

In the wilderness the Israelites came to take the heavenly grace of manna for granted. Some took more than they needed, and then found what they’d left for the next day had gone mouldy. They also got bored and wanted meat. Do we who live comfortable lives sometimes take God’s grace for granted – and then want something more, or different? The Israelites had to learn that “people do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3) If they had to learn that, so do we.

The thing about bread in the time of Jesus was that it was needed fresh every day. No doubt this is hard for us to appreciate in Harpenden in 2021. We have so much choice – too much sometimes – but then many would only have the basics, and bread was the basic food on which they depended. They needed it fresh every day. (If you have a bread making machine maybe you do make bread every day, and there's nothing like the smell of freshly baked bread to wake our appetites up!)

In Psalm 104, verses 14 and 15, we read: “He makes grass to grow for cattle, and plants for man to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.” Does Jesus, the bread of life, sustain our hearts today?

This concept of bread from heaven was of huge significance to Jewish people – and we must never forget that our Christian roots come from the same as theirs. Not only did Jesus say, “I am the bread of life” (v.35), he added “I am the bread that came down from heaven” (v.41, which is what the Jews could not comprehend because they knew he was the local carpenter's son. And then in verse 51 he goes on, “this bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Today we know how the story unfolds and realise Jesus was talking about his death and resurrection to pay for the world's sins. I doubt if Simon Peter and the other close disciples understood what he meant then, but, although many turned away from Jesus, they held on in faith, even in their doubt and confusion, and through the Last Supper, when Jesus broke the bread and drank from the cup, we have our Eucharist, Holy Communion.

Did you know there are more than 100 different types of bread? It is the most consumed foodstuff in the world, and forms a central part of the diet in many countries. This isn't the first time Jesus and bread are linked – in the wilderness when tempted by the devil to turn the stones into bread and assuage his hunger, we're told his response was “It is written man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4) Jesus is the one who fills that gnawing sense of hunger that cannot be satisfied by anything else – nothing else lasts. The world may seem to have much to offer, but in truth there is nothing of lasting value in living outside of God's will.

In the Lord's Prayer, we regularly pray that He would "give us today our daily bread". So where do we go to get that daily bread? Like the manna in the wilderness this daily bread is given fresh every day, but where do we find it? Do we take the time every day to turn to God, to feed on his Word, to listen to Him in our prayer time? Or as Canon Kevin wrote last week, "is Jesus really the bread of my life (our lives), or the icing on the cake? The bit I (we) tend to when everything else is in place."

Bread – in order for it to sustain life, bread must be eaten. The people in the wilderness ate the manna every day, and it sustained them for that day. Where do we find our bread of life every day? What sustains us, you, me, and enables us to live out our faith? During these months of Covid-19, I have found doing Morning Prayer on Zoom with others a good way to start the day, often being surprised by the thoughts triggered by some of the words. For many years I have used daily Bible reading notes which have proved to be a good foundation, with helpful words unpacking the passage for the day. And some of us now meet at 5.00 pm on Wednesdays to say Evening Prayer in St John's. There is a smart phone app "c of e daily prayer" which contains Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer, and can be used any time. I would encourage you to search for and find a source of this bread of life for yourselves – and feed on Jesus every day, not just Sundays when you come to St John's.

Prayers

Collect for this Sunday

Lord of heaven and earth,
as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer,
give us patience and courage never to lose hope,
but always to bring our prayers before you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Giver and sustainer of life,
through the power of the cross we are a forgiven people,
a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
chosen by you
who has called us out of darkness into your marvellous light. Amen.

Jesus, you told your followers that whoever comes to you will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in you will never be thirsty.
We still live among those who are hungry and thirsty for bread and water and who also seek you.
In a world full of misinformation and false assumptions,
help us to live in response to your promises,
and to show your love more clearly,
that you may be found in us. Amen.

We thank you and praise you, Lord God,
that despite our assumptions and judgements
and the way we sometimes treat others,
you never stop loving us.
Bread of life, you are always with us.
We praise you that as we draw near to you,
you quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger,
so that we never need hunger or thirst again.
Thank you that you equip us and resource us
with everything we need for this journey of life.
We thank and praise you, Lord God. Amen

Lord of heaven and earth,
as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer,
give us patience and courage never to lose hope,
but always to bring out prayers before you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer for:

Sunday	The Church of South India (United)
Monday	The Diocese of Duk – The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan
Tuesday	The Diocese of Dunedin – The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia
Wednesday	The Diocese of Dunkwa-on-Offin – The Church of the Province of West Africa

Thursday	The Diocese of Durgapur – The (united) Church of North India
Friday	The Diocese of Durham – The Church of England
Saturday	The Diocese of Dutse – The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Hitchin (Deanery of Hitchin)
Monday	Parish of Holwell (Deanery of Hitchin)
Tuesday	Parish of Ickleford (Deanery of Hitchin)
Wednesday	Parish of Kings Walden (Deanery of Hichin)
Thursday	Parish of Letchworth (Deanery of Hitchin)
Friday	Parish of Letchworth, St Paul (Deanery of Hitchin)
Saturday	Parish of Lilley (Deanery of Hitchin)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Netherfield Road, Newton Close
Monday	Oak Way, Oakfield Road
Tuesday	Oakhurst Avenue, Oakley Road
Wednesday	Paddock Wood, Parva Close
Thursday	Pendennis Court, Pennycroft
Friday	Piggottshill Lane
Saturday	Pipers Avenue, Poynings Close

The Sick:

Claire, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Chris and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Ken Bolt, Brenda Guy, Joy Peak.

On their year's mind:

Florence Clare, Marie Bailey, Philip Noble, Aileen Morley, John Borthwick, Gladys Readman.

Church Opening times

Other services / in Church congregation

- Evening Prayer on Wednesdays at 5.00pm
- Sunday 9.30am Parish Eucharist
- Short Family service on Sunday 19 September at 4.00 pm

Private Prayer

- Saturday opening (in addition to Sunday), 11.00am – 4.00pm

A reminder... of this phone service:

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

Church at home:

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie (Parish Office Tel: 01582 712776).