**Morning Praise @ Home 11th August 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading John 6: 35, 41 – 51

### Reflection from Sue

We’ve seen a lot of civil disorder on our screens recently by far-right aggressors, out on the streets protesting about immigration – about outsiders coming to take up the jobs, health system and accommodation that the rioters consider ‘ours’. Incomers are regarded as ‘other’ / ‘them’. So imagine if Jesus faced down these protestors and said, ‘Actually, asylum seekers indeed will be given the privileges you feel only you deserve; they are equal in God’s eyes to you; they are to be cherished.’ How offensive! It’s likely he would soon be on the ground, bleeding.

In our passage today, Jesus is causing the same level of offense to faithful Jews, Israelites who had spent their lives embedded within ‘their’ faith: honouring the books of Moses, receiving God’s laws, memorising prophecy, revering the holiness of God, and hoping that, after death, there would be a better life on offer. What Christ proclaims both confuses and challenges them, yet his message is so important that he keeps driving it home (as our returning sermons to this one chapter demonstrate).

* ‘You say you want to hear from God?’ he says to the crowd. ‘Well, just like Hosea and Jeremiah foretold, God is drawing you … to ME.’ (v44) (The implication being that, if you resist Jesus, you are actually resisting God.)
* ‘You think that simply because you are good, circumcised Jews, that after death you will somehow merit being woken up to be with God? NO. It is I who will raise [believers] up at the last day (v44)’
* ‘You long to be taught by God directly, like Isaiah promises? Well, God is teaching you to listen to me’ (v.45) because I come directly from Him.’
* ‘You believe God’s holy presence dwells in the Temple’s inapproachable Holy of Holies? NO. The One who has his Being alongside the Father has seen Him—and now you can see me. (v 46)’ (ie. It doesn’t take a High Priest: by interacting with Jesus now, they’re getting God direct)
* ‘You are reassured by the fact that God provided food for the people fleeing from Egypt under Moses, even though that didn’t ultimately save them from dying? Here I am offering God’s true bread, which will preserve you into eternity. (vv49-50) In fact I am that bread!’

Point by point, Jesus is reinterpreting their precious scriptures, insisting that his people need to re-focus on what God is really offering, rather than what their religion had become…

No wonder they are outraged. ‘How dare he! Who does he think he is, this nobody from Galilee!’

In bickering about Christ’s origins, the religious leaders were trying to put him down, to contain him, and thereby stop their own power slipping away. But Jesus sees straight through their motives, in effect saying: ‘You’re not in charge here. The Father who sent me is in charge.’

* The same is true of us and our worship, especially if it ever tries to ‘box God in’. Accepting what God is offering means we need to give up trying to do things our way and humble ourselves before him.

Meanwhile, the crowd had flocked to Jesus because he’d just fed them. They wanted a slot-machine God who would perform miracles to order and fulfil their personal needs. There’s no mention of anyone talking about commitment, about becoming disciples of Christ. Literal bread was what he’d just provided and literal bread was all they were looking for.

* Yet Jesus wants to take them a level higher, asking them to see that the bread he’s talking about is something more. He echoes Deuteronomy (8:3) that ‘one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’

The fact that bread was a staple food element in Israelite diets meant it was also used in the Old Testament to represent God’s word. Just as bread fulfils a bodily need and should be chewed carefully, so Jesus is calling his hearers to listen to the essential sustenance he’s providing for them and take it in.

We wouldn’t think of not eating for days at a time, or only eating once a week – our bodies would soon run out of energy and we’d accomplish very little! Yet only occasionally ‘chewing’ on God’s word, or just passively observing it each Sunday, has a similar effect on our spiritual lives – we become weak and languid, ineffectual when Christ calls us to serve his people.

* ‘Come on!’ Jesus urges us. ‘Engage with what I say in your Bibles (or Bible apps!). Listen to me, discover me, encounter God for yourselves; invite my Holy Spirit to bring the Word alive each day; let it shape how you behave.’ It’s an echo of Isaiah 55 (v.2): ‘Listen to me and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.’

In Galilee that day, the crowds were bewildered, some becoming resentful. The way they’d been taught to understand both their faith and their relationship with God was being challenged by this charismatic man. And they didn’t all ‘get it’.

It’s easy to judge them, because we know how events panned out. So, when Jesus concludes: (v51) ‘I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.’ we can see how that comes to pass:

* that Jesus will sacrifice his physical body/his flesh on the Cross to pay for for the world’s rebellion;
* that he is living still, following his resurrection from death;
* that his followers can symbolically eat his bread/his body, as we regularly do when we celebrate Holy Communion;
* that he has ensured those who believe in him and ‘feed’ on his word will live for ever, appropriating Jesus into our own life.

It all makes sense with hindsight! But for his original hearers, it must have sounded weird, seemed impossible: ‘What?! How?!’ Jesus is asking them to have faith when they can’t see over the horizon of that day, can’t comprehend what he can see only too clearly.

Before we censure the crowd, perhaps we need to ask of ourselves: how easy do we find it to hold on to Christ’s words when they speak of something we haven’t yet seen or can’t understand? On the personal scale, how many of us have lived through circumstances where it has been really hard to see how God was working? Perhaps a failed marriage, or wayward kids, perhaps unfair victimisation, job loss, debilitating injury or depression. ‘Where are you in this mess Lord?’ Yet Jesus promises that we can trust him. There will come a time when we will see with his perspective.

Jesus was starting something off that has changed the world. He has opened a route for us to be personally with God, sharing in the relationship that he has with his Father, inviting everyone, both ‘us’ and ‘them’, to share in ‘the bread of life.’ But many in the world have disdained his bread: they want to live ‘their’ way, not His way. And so the arch rebel subtly guides them away from Christ’s feast and traps them in darkness.

But Jesus is utterly serious about what he is offering: ‘I’m telling you the most solemn and sober truth now: Whoever believes in me has real life, eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. .. Anyone eating this Bread will not die, ever. I am the Bread—living Bread!—who came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this Bread will live—and forever!’

Many in our own families, in our local community, think Jesus’ invitation is irrelevant to their lives. It might be for ‘others’ but why should they bother? Yet they are missing out on the food that saves them from dying. Furthermore, they will not see God (except as their judge), will not enjoy everlasting togetherness with Christ, but exclusion. We surely cannot want that for our neighbours!

Or would we actually rather hold on to ‘the way we like to do things’, our privacy about our faith, our polite conversation. Jesus offended his hearers, challenging the way they operated, because he loved them and wanted to save them. In this passage, he calls us:

* to digest his words through prayerfully reading our Bibles, just as regularly as we eat our meals
* to share his living bread, in whatever way helps others and enables them to flourish at his feast
* and be prepared to challenge and offend those around us, because we love them.

Are we prepared to enter the fray? **AMEN**

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**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by John**

Heavenly Father, as we reflect upon the Scripture for today we pray for all who follow in the steps of Jesus and are commissioned and called to work as leaders and Prophets in your Church. Strengthen them with the courage to speak your truth when it is inconvenient and goes against the grain in both Church and wider culture. We pray for greater discernment of your presence and your will in our own church and in the wider church and a clearing away of all that obscures our vision.

Lord, open our eyes **to see your glory.**

Lord God, we pray for the life of the nations who being blinded to your love for all humanity persist in violence, enslavement and economic abuse.

Call all leaders back from the brink of war, deter those who threaten our communities with violent rhetoric. Protect those citizens who live in danger and fear and give to us all a voice which promotes the wellbeing of all those living among us.

Lord, open our eyes **to see your glory.**

Lord Jesus, you welcomed and embraced the young and the old, the privileged and the dispossessed. Help us in our little parishes to extend our ministry to those who are strangers to your love. Restore to us an outward facing approach that longs for the young to join in our aging congregations. Thank you that we can and do serve the frail and those approaching the end of life but please grant us a breakthrough among all who currently find no reason to explore faith and to become followers of Jesus.

Lord, open our eyes **to see your glory.**

Holy Spirit, you gave birth to the church and are the sole means by which we can be born anew as members of your Kingdom. Come among us with renewing grace, power and love. Blow away the cobwebs of blind religion and fill us with the presence of the risen Christ that we may be the best that we can be as his friends and followers. Nourish us with the Bread of Life himself.

Lord, open our eyes **to see your glory.**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**