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**Sunday 12th August 2018**

**Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

**John 6:35, 41-51**

**The Rev’d Jenny Wilson**

In the name of God, creating, redeeming, sanctifying, ... Amen.

The 6th Chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John is all about bread. The chapter opens with Jesus feeding a large crowd with bread and fish offered by a small boy. Jesus takes the loaves and the fish and after giving thanks he distributes them to the crowd. When the meal is finished the disciples gather the leftover fragments, enough to fill twelve baskets. Jesus sees the hunger of the crowd and feeds them generously.

Later that day, the crowd come searching in boats for Jesus who has crossed the sea; this crowd is keen to see him, this one who has fed them. But Jesus challenges them. “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” (John 6:26-7) The crowd does not understand him. And when he has talked to this crowd about their need for faith, they still do not understand him and they ask for a sign, a sign like the one that their ancestors received in the desert, when God gave them the manna, bread for each day, and God gave them water to drink that flowed out from a rock. The crowd has been given a sign but they have not noticed. Just like those ancestors, freed from slavery in Egypt by the hand of God, just like these ancestors, the crowd grumble. They are in the presence of the one who will give them eternal life, the deepest things of life, and they do not see it and they do not hear and they do not understand.

Jesus says 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.’ (6:35) Jesus knows that the crowd only sees that he has fed them physically. The crowd in fact only understands their needs as physical. They seem oblivious to the deep things, the deep needs of a human being. A little later in the conversation Jesus says, ‘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.’ (6:43-5)

Jesus is making reference to the great longing of God expressed through the prophet Jeremiah. *I will put my law within them,* says God *and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*(Jeremiah 31:33-4)

Is this the essence of the eternal life to which Jesus refers? A life of faith. Faith in the knowledge that we belong to God, that we are made in the image of God. That we live and breathe God’s ways, guided by the great commandments to love God and to love one another as we love ourselves. Faith in the truth that we are forgiven by God. Is this the essence of eternal life? Not so much a life that goes on forever in time but a life of faith, a faith that we are held in the deep love of God, knowing forgiveness is found there.

The writer of the Letter to the Ephesians from which we heard read this morning seems to ask of the people of Ephesus, of us, a lot.  “*Always speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ... always work honestly and let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, ... so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ... Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love.*” (Ephesians 4:25-32) This writer asks a lot. How do we live this way, flawed as we are?

“I am the bread of life,” Jesus says. He seems to be saying that faith in him is as critical as the bread that enables us to live. Faith – this place where we struggle to live well as we have been exhorted to live well. Faith - this place where we are not sure we understand, where we are not sure quite what we believe some days. Jesus is saying that faith in him is as fundamental as the food essential for our survival, bread. And if we wonder if water is not more critical to our life then Jesus claims that image too. “Those who drink of the water that I give them will never be thirsty,” Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at the well in chapter 4 of this mighty gospel. As we read through the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus claims image after image from the religious stories of those before him. Bread and water and light, the shepherd that cares for his flock of sheep, the vine in which those listening to him are the branches, the way and truth and life. And if that isn’t enough he claims these images in many cases using the words “I am”. “I am the bread of life.” “I am the good shepherd.” “I am, I am, I am,” Jesus says over and over again, in the words God used when asked for a name by Moses beside the bush that was burning but not consumed. “Who are you?” Moses says. “Who shall I say is sending me?” Moses said. “Say “I am” sent you,” says God in return. And then years later, Jesus uses those same words “I am,” weaving images from our earthly life and images from the scripture stories that sustained the lives of the disciples and the crowd who were sitting before him claiming that they all point to him. Jesus uses the God description “I am” and the religious images pointing to the life God gives and he claims them all. Jesus is very close to God; Jesus is at the core of his being a source of life. A source of life for all of us, for all things, all creation.

Are we like the crowd some days, knowing this in some ways but still struggling.

There’s just one thing ...Would you give us a sign? A little more proof?

Here we are sitting in our cathedral two thousand years later. May we ask you a question as the crowd did? Is it really possible for us to live knowing that you the bread of our life, the living water, that you are more vital to us than food and money and the security that we who are so fortunate can store up for ourselves.

How do we know him? Know God? We can reflect on what seems essential to us, is it bread or water, is it the light of the sun, is it someone who is like a shepherd for us, someone who holds in love our family or workplace? What could we not live without? Jesus seems to be saying, whatever that is, he is at the core of it; he is the ground of it. That if we feel we cannot *be* without something, whatever it is, that that something gives us insight into what he is for us, that we cannot *be* without him. Our faith in God however frail it may seem to us some days is the most precious thing we have. And we cannot possibly even begin to live as the writer to the Ephesians invites us to live, with honesty and tender hearts and forgiveness for one another, we cannot even begin to live in this way without day by day remembering that we are held in God, the God we know in Christ.

It’s not about asking for another sign, just a little more proof that God is with us, loves us, won’t desert us, when it feels like we’re alone. I guess it’s about praying, really, whatever prayer is like for us. We don’t have to be down on our knees, you know. We don’t even have to be in church, though it helps us to gather, the frail body of Christ, to reach out our hands together for the bread that is his body. It’s really about giving God time, however spending time with God seems right for God and us. Prayer is really about giving God time.

The poet Mary Oliver put it this way:

**The Summer Day**

*Who made the world?*

*Who made the swan, and the black bear?*

*Who made the grasshopper?*

*This grasshopper, I mean-*

*the one who has flung herself out of the grass,*

*the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,*

*who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-*

*who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.*

*Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.*

*Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.*

*I don't know exactly what a prayer is.*

*I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down*

*into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,*

*how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,*

*which is what I have been doing all day.*

*Tell me, what else should I have done?*

*Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?*

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do*

*with your one wild and precious life?*

We could ask God for another sign ... or we could hear God’s voice asking us ...

*what is it you plan to do*

*with your one wild and precious life?*