

The Bread that Really Satisfies

1 August 2021

St Peter's, 8am and 9:30am

Reading: John 6:24-35

What's your favourite meal? If you had a last meal before going to the guillotine, what would it be? It's hard to imagine why you are going to the guillotine but bear with me. What is it that would really satisfy? They're bad for me on about four levels but I like fish and chips. I especially those hot dogs you get at the A & P show that have the tomato sauce already soaked into it. Yum.

A Japanese person she told me she doesn't feel content until she has had rice. She said it's as if she has two stomachs: a rice one and another one. Of course, she doesn't have two stomachs but it's as if she does. I could relate to her words as my father-in-law, a farmer from South Canterbury, didn't feel full until he had had potatoes. At dinner you had potatoes. At breakfast you had the potatoes you hadn't eaten the night before and for lunch you had fried potatoes that hadn't been eaten at breakfast or the night before and then you started over.

We are following John's Gospel at the moment and today we hear another of the Bread of Life narratives. Last week it was the feeding of the five thousand. Today Jesus explicitly describes himself as "the bread of life". He makes a link with the bread Moses and the Hebrews got in the desert - the flaky manna that came down from heaven. But he is a different sort of bread. He describes himself as being a bread that really satisfies. Verse 35 from the Message version goes like this: Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers and thirsts no more, ever."

You see there are different types of hunger. There's hunger for food but there is also hunger for meaning and purpose in our lives.

Bernard Levin, a 20th century writer puts this hunger for purpose and meaning well: *“Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet they lead lives of desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside of them. And however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motorcars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it, it aches it aches.”*

The good news is that Jesus is the Bread that satisfies that hole that is within us for meaning and purpose.

We all need a purpose for our lives. A group of cunning scientists put this to the test. They found a representative group of rest home residents. To one group they gave a pot plant. “Your task,” they said “is to care for this plant. Water it, weed it, prune its branches.” To the other group they gave nothing. Over time the sense of wellbeing was measurably better for those tending a pot plant. They even lived longer on average.

Jesus gives us purpose; the purpose of our lives is sharing his love. This gives us meaning and focus. No longer are we a collection of random atoms afloat in a senseless universe. Jesus tells us he loves and cares for us, so much so that he is even willing to die for us.

The great theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, was thinking about finding purpose when he wrote the famous serenity prayer. This prayer was picked up by the AA (that’s Alcoholics Anonymous, not the Automobile Association). The beginning of the prayer for Serenity is well known but not the full prayer. It goes like this:

*God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things*

*which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.*

*Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.*

It's all there - grace, meaning, purpose, trust. These are what Jesus brings to our lives.

So, what does it feel like to have this hole, this hunger in us filled with the bread of life? The best word I can offer you is contentment. To find in Jesus meaning and purpose for our lives is joy, it is satisfaction, it is deep contentment. Sometimes only music and poetry and art can begin to do justice to this inner joy and peace.

DH Lawrence gives us a poem entitled Peace:

*All that matters is to be at one with the living God
To be a creature in the house of the God of life.*

*Like a cat asleep on a chair
At peace, in peace
And at one with the master of the house
At home, at home in the house of the living*

Sleeping on the hearth and yawning before the fire.

Bread is good and so are rice, potatoes, and hot dogs on a stick, but in Jesus we have discovered the Bread of Life which truly satisfies, the Bread of Life that gives us deep abiding peace.