

Sunday 1 August 2021 Printed Service (prepared by Vicky Green)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus says: 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

Singing the Faith 254

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia

Ask and it shall be given unto you;
seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and the door will be opened unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia

We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, Alleluia

(Karen Lafferty 1948-)

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Prayer

Great God of wonders
we glorify you
for you open our eyes to marvels -
the flash of a dragonfly over a lily pond,
the eager reaching of leaves for the sun
the pull and tug of waves on the beach
We worship you
for you open our ears to music -
the richness of dawn birdsong,

the power of human speech.
We praise you
for you open our hearts to love -
your love,
lavished on us,
poured out for us
in Jesus our Lord, crucified, risen
and standing among us.

Loving Father
we your children receive with joy
all you have given to us
in the light of the Holy Spirit
AMEN.

Our Father, who art in heaven
hallowed be your name
your kingdom come
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us
and lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil
for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory
for ever and ever
AMEN

Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we

had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining." ' And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God." '

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

John 6: 24-35

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered 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. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.' Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." ' Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'

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.

Singing the Faith 153

Break thou the bread of life,
O Lord, to me,
as thou didst break the loaves
beside the sea.
Beyond the sacred page,
I seek thee, Lord;
My spirit longs for thee,
O living word!

Thou art the Bread of Life,
O Lord, to me,
thy holy word the truth
that saveth me;
give me to eat and live
with thee above;
teach me to love thy truth,

for thou art love.

O send thy Spirit, Lord,
now unto me,
that he may touch my eyes,
and make me see;
show me the truth concealed
within thy word,
and in thy book revealed
I see the Lord.

(Mary Artemesia Lathbury 1841-1913, Alexander Groves 1842-1909)

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Sermon

Jesus says 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' And in our worship we come to him, say we believe in him - and yet we still hunger and thirst for righteousness, still knock on his door begging - for what? What are we so hungry for?

The people of Israel are physically hungry, complaining about Moses: Moses who has taken them away from the fleshpots of Egypt, where they had plenty to eat. They complain about Moses, but they are really complaining about God. So it is God who answers. The manna, the "what's this?" is the Lord's reply to their complaints: a free gift. By it they should know that they are his people, and he is their God. "What's this?" they say. "I don't understand, what's this?" Moses says: "Bread given by God." And they remembered, and wrote it down, and kept a piece of God's gift with the Ark of the covenant to keep reminding them.

The crowds following Jesus were hungry, 5,000 of them. The disciples had 5 barley loaves and two fish, but what was that among so many? Then Jesus broke the bread and blessed it, and gave it to the crowd, and they had as much as they wanted. They ate the bread and their

hunger was satisfied. But they didn't understand. Like the Israelites in the desert they saw only the obvious: the food they could eat to satisfy their bodies' hunger. They didn't understand what that food represented, what it stood for, what it symbolised. The bread given by God. What's this? We don't understand. The bread stands for something. But what does it stand for?

That's the trouble with symbols and signs: it isn't always obvious what they mean. The smell of wallflowers in the parks in the spring always makes me think of Shakespeare. I don't expect you to make the same connection. It is a private sign to me, reminding me of a Spring when I stayed in Stratford and walked around the gardens of Shakespeare's birthplace, where the flowerbeds were overflowing with wallflowers warm from the sun and heavy with that earthy dark perfume.

My grandfather kept a shilling on his watch-chain, punched with a rough hole at the carriage works. It was dated the year of his birth. I wear it now round my neck even though Queen Victoria hangs upside down (he had to make a new hole when the first one wore through), because it belonged to him, and reminds me of him.

My sister has Grandad's watch hanging on her wall. It doesn't go, and can't be repaired, but it doesn't matter: it reminds her of him. Private signs and symbols and remembrances. That's the way our minds work. A trigger. A Representation.

Jesus knew that: so he gave his disciples things to remember him by. Things to bring him to mind every day at every meal. Whenever they ate the bread, they would remember his hands reaching out to bless and break and share. Bread is such a common thing. Such an ordinary thing. Jesus didn't just take something like Grandad's shilling or his watch, a private memento bringing back private memory. He took something we all have experience of. Signs and symbols work by drawing on what is in our mind's eye: what we remember when we catch a scent, see an image, hear a word.

What is in our mind's eye when we think about bread? A baker's shop full of rolls and sticks, bloomers and tins? Supermarket shelves full in

identical packaging? Wobbly homemade fresh and hot and slightly burnt, the crust flaking into crumbs, the texture of mixed air and moisture: hunger satisfied.

We see our own loaves, our own staple diet. Never mind that the bread Jesus broke was flat, like pitta bread, or the unleavened bread, like water biscuit, of the Passover. We see those hands reach for a slice of Best of Both, tear at a granary roll, break a baguette, share a split tin. We do not have to ask, "what's this?" We understand this much at least. It would not have stood in the apostles' mind's eye as it stands in ours, But the meaning is the same for us all. We know what Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus meant when they said that he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

Because he is made known to us in the same way. We remember the Upper Room where Jesus took bread and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying "Do this in remembrance of me. This is my body, broken for you." We see in our mind's eye those hands, breaking and dividing the Passover Bread. The Last Supper. The Lord's Supper. Holy Communion. Eucharist, Mass. Breaking of Bread. For some Christian traditions, that is their service, daily, weekly, monthly, the cornerstone of their worship and their Christian lives. Others, like the Salvation Army and the Quakers, don't celebrate it at all, saying that every time they break bread, at every meal, they are remembering the Lord.

The services I take as a local preacher are not the services when we perform those actions Jesus asked him to perform to remember him by. We have had so few opportunities these long locked-down months to be together and share the bread. We have had so little chance to be at one of those services, when what is in our mind's eye becomes focussed on the actual, physical fact of the bread broken for us, the wine poured out for many. Real hands breaking real bread. So what are we doing as we pray together and apart? As we take part in this service in our scattered homes? We are looking for something, hungering for something, longing for something. For someone. For

Jesus. And he is here, the free gift of God, the sign that we are his people. In the words we sing and the words we pray and the silence between the words. Whether we break bread on altar or communion table, at home or in a restaurant. "What's this? the bread God gives his people!"

Singing the Faith 465

Guide me , O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side;
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.
(William Williams 1717-1791)

Intercessions

Father God

you sent your son into the world
to give life

water in the desert

bread for hungry bodies, souls and minds

yet all we seem to see is dryness

desperation

starvation

the dryness of policy without compassion

the desperation of people who can see no way out

no one to help

empty men and women

without resources

Fill them Lord

with your mercy and grace

Call them to your feast

LORD, IN YOUR MERCY

HEAR OUR PRAYER

Lord Jesus

we cannot comprehend the numbers

the thousands

packed in refugee camps

driven from their homes by war

and threat of war

washed out of their homes by flood

and the threat of flood

When you were faced with 5000 hungry, thirsty people

you had compassion on them

you fed them

gave them enough and more than enough

may help reach the hungry, thirsty thousands we are faced with

and may it be enough and more than enough

LORD, IN YOUR MERCY

HEAR OUR PRAYER

Holy Spirit

remembrancer divine

people we know and love stand in our minds eye

laid on our hearts: the sick, the sorrowing, the lonely

we name them in the silence

you know their needs

Fill them with your mercy and grace

encourage and strengthen them

refresh them

may they know they are not alone

LORD, IN YOUR MERCY

HEAR OUR PRAYER

We offer these prayers

we offer ourselves

that our work should be your work

O Lord of Life.

AMEN

Singing the Faith 663

I, the Lord of sea and sky,

I have heard my people cry.

All who dwell in dark and sin

my hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night,

I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them?

Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

*I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.
I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

*I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.
(Daniel L Schutte 1947-)*

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Blessing

“Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Saviour, abide with us and spread
your table in our heart”

The Lord is with us
AMEN