

Service for use at home 8th August 2021

“I am the bread of life”

StF 568 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus,
His the sceptre, his the throne.
Alleluia! His the triumph,
His the victory alone.
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion
Thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus, out of every nation,
Has redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! Not as orphans
Are we left in sorrow now.
Alleluia! He is near us,
Faith believes, nor questions how.
Though the cloud from sight received him
When the forty days were o'er,
Shall our hearts forget his promise,
I am with you evermore?

Alleluia! Bread of angels,
Thou on earth our food, our stay.
Alleluia! Here the sinful
Flee to thee from day to day.
Intercessor, friend of sinners,
Earth's redeemer, plead for me,
Where the songs of all the sinless
Sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! King eternal,
Thee the Lord of lords we own.
Alleluia! Born of Mary,
Earth thy footstool, heaven thy throne.
Thou within the veil hast entered,
Robed in flesh, our great High Priest;
Thou on earth both priest and victim
In the eucharistic feast.

William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

Prayer

Loving God,
We come to offer our praises to you.
You are the one who gives us life,
Life in abundance,
By pouring gifts and fruit into our lives
Beyond measure and beyond price.
Gifts that we can never deserve
Because we are sinful people
Who fail you in so many different ways.
Yet you want to pour out your love upon us
And have provided the means for our forgiveness
In Jesus Christ your Son.
May we hear his gracious word
Telling us that our sins are forgiven,
And may we offer our lives to you
In praise and adoration. Amen.

John 6: 35, 45-51

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God."^[a] Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ 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.'

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I am the bread of life,
He who comes to me shall not hunger;
He who believes in me shall not thirst:
No one can come to me unless the Father draw him:

*And I will raise him up,
And I will raise him up,
And I will raise him up
On the last day.*

The bread that I will give
Is my flesh for the life of the world;
And he who eats of this bread,
He shall live for ever,
He shall live for ever.

Unless you eat
Of the flesh of the Son of Man
And drink of his blood,
And drink of his blood,
You shall not have life within you.

I am the resurrection,
I am the life;
He who believes in me,
Even if he die,
He shall live for ever:

Yes Lord, we believe
That you are the Christ,
The Son of God,
Who has come
Into the world.
Anonymous

Sermon

A few weeks ago, the Methodist Conference gave approval for the celebration of "Virtual" Holy Communion during a trial period of 3 years beginning on 1st September. In the statement accompanying this decision they recognised that people hold a wide range of views as to what happens at a celebration of Holy Communion and acknowledged that none of us can really know the truth. Although for the sake of order the Methodist Church requires such a service to be led by an ordained minister or somebody holding a dispensation to celebrate, I do not believe that I, or anybody else, says words that change the substance of

what we are eating or drinking or that the bread and wine are any holier after I've prayed over them than they were before. I believe that the transformation comes when those receiving the elements receive them as the body and blood of Christ. At that point they become life transforming for those who eat and drink.

Jesus, in the above passage from St. John's Gospel, describes himself as the Bread of Life and goes on to speak of people who will eat this bread which is my flesh. Is it any surprise that there is disquiet amongst those who hear his words or that the early Christians were accused of holding feasts that involved cannibalism? This whole theme is something which is very difficult to grasp. Those listening to Jesus have been brought up on the story of the manna in the desert, the wonder food provided by God for the Israelites on their long journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. But Jesus takes this to a whole new dimension in saying that those who ate the manna died eventually whereas those who eat the bread that he will give will live forever.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians says that for him, "to live is Christ and to die is gain." Yet, we determinedly cling onto this world and speak of it being a tragedy when people die before we think they should. I had the privilege of being present at a short talk given by a Christian heart consultant to Junior Doctors where he told them that to try to cling on to life at all costs was a mistake, but one that was made by a lot of doctors. I suspect that number has increased with the growing threat of litigation.

Jesus is asking his hearers to take a tremendous leap from the physical into the spiritual realm, from the life of this world into the life everlasting which is not an easy thing for any of us to do whether that relates to life and death or the substances of bread and wine at Holy Communion. Those attracted to Celtic Spirituality often speak of thin places, places where the physical and spiritual worlds come very close together. I've

often puzzled over the idea of parallel universes and whether there can be a link between the two because it seems to me that's what happens at the time of Jesus' baptism and during the transfiguration, one reality breaking in upon another.

Many people struggle with that balance between the spiritual and the physical and find themselves unable to believe in Christianity because of it. Other people have to somehow translate everything into the physical environment that they understand and keep spiritual matters separate. God is greater than that and God's existence is far beyond our human understanding but through the death of Jesus he calls us to be part of that existence for evermore. I used to get frustrated when people asked me to explain something that was beyond my understanding because I felt that I ought to be able to do it. Now I'm much happier to live with things that I can't understand because I am sure of the presence of God in my life.

Which brings me back to the Bread of Life. Many of us have struggled with not being able to receive Holy Communion during lockdown and it's good that we are able to receive the elements again in church even if it's not in the way that we would usually expect to do it. Obviously, there's still an issue for those who don't feel able to come out to attend church yet but if that's still the case in September there will be an experimental way round it. During that time of lockdown, I've been aware of God continuing to feed me in different ways through the wonders of creation and the love of my brothers and sisters in Christ and thank God for it.

In whatever way we receive it, may we continue to feed on the Bread of Life and by the Holy Spirit find ways of showing what a difference that makes to the way we live our lives here on earth because we can have that assurance that this life is not the end. We have the promise of life with God for ever more.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for the life of the world,
For its peace,
Remembering all those areas where there is conflict.
For its justice
Remembering all those areas where people are oppressed.
For a sharing of its riches
Remembering all those who hunger and thirst
Or who cannot receive medical attention.
For those in authority
Who have the power to change things.

We pray for our own country,
For those who are afraid
As we move out of restrictions.
For those who have lost jobs and livelihoods,
For those without a secure home,
For those facing family problems
Or living in abusive relationships.

We pray for those we know
Naming them before God....

And we pray for ourselves
That we may know the love and power of God
In our lives
This day and always. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

StF 465 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

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)
Translated by Peter Williams (1727-1796)

May God bless us and keep us
Now and always. Amen