

Harvest Thanksgiving 2021

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.’” (St. John 6.35)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

This morning’s Gospel is about our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ – yours and mine. It begins with a word about ‘meat’ and progresses quickly to bread; Then, it closes with a revelation – a statement about Who Jesus is -- “I am the Bread of Life”.

Interestingly, in the last edition of the Book of Common Prayer, today’s Gospel began a verse earlier. It added this previous verse:

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, Truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.’” It was the day after He had miraculously fed a crowd of 5000 with five barley loaves and two fish, and those people had come to be with Him again. This time, He wanted to teach them rather than feed them; so, He initiated a conversation about food. “You are seeking me,” He said “not because of yesterday’s miracle, but because you received a free meal”.

It was a statement about their motivation that day. But it served as a way of opening a conversation about what really drives us – what forms our aspirations in life -- our interests, our hobbies and our work. So, having already spent a day with these people, Jesus launched into His main point: *“Do not labour for the food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you.”* Basically He challenged them to open their hearts and minds to the spiritual realm – to what is invisible and eternal. ...We are prone to get stuck in material things. He wanted them to look beyond their bellies.

It is important to note that He called Himself ‘the Son of Man’. *“Labour for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you”*. That title is found in the Old Testament Book of the Prophet Daniel. By using it, Jesus was referring to the Messiah, and to the restoration and glory of Israel. The people picked up on that and immediately asked, *“What must we do to be doing the works of God?”* (Repeat)

We can hear ourselves in that question. We often ask: ‘what should we do now?’ ‘What are we working on today?’ ‘It was a good day – I got a lot of work done’. Work is a huge part of our life; and, it is a very big factor in terms of our identity and self-esteem; and about how we see ourselves. We identify ourselves by what we *do*. But, Jesus has a better way: He told the crowd that doing God’s work begins with, and is found in, the Bread of Life. “*The bread of God,*” He said “*is He Who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*”. Then He said, “*I am the Bread of Life: whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*”

Our real work – the most important work that we can do in our whole life -- is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. That being the case, the Lord is saying that our identity is in Him. Our worth as a person – in fact our very life -- is not in what we do, but rather in God. Who am I? I am a human being – a mere mortal. I am a miserable sinner who daily misses the mark of God’s Way and holiness. I am a husband, a father, a son and a brother; and I am an Anglican Priest – but none of those can change my mortality or absolve my sin. None of those aspects of my identity can bring me the hope and forgiveness and healing and confidence that my scared little human SELF needs.

“*I am the Bread of Life,*” Jesus said “*whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*” In other words, He will satisfy my needs – He will be my food and drink – my Bread, my sustenance. He will provide my soul with the life of God – something that neither work nor money can do.

Who am I? Having been baptized into Christ, I am the child of God; a member of Christ and an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven. He is my Hope and my Strength. In Him I find my home; my refuge; my security; the place where I belong; and my true identity. He has adopted you as His own child and made you a member of His family – think of that! We have received far more than we could dream of, and infinitely more than we deserve.

That is the Gospel for Harvest Thanksgiving. In a season of feverish work to gather in and prepare food for the winter, there is this simple truth: we did not make the potatoes grow; we did not send the rain for the wheat fields; we cannot claim responsibility for the abundant crop of tomatoes. All of it is a gift from God Who calls us to Himself through His Son. That is our true work – to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and to follow Him.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...

