

HOMILY for Sunday 15th August 2021

by Revd Angela Wynne

11th Sunday after Trinity

Many of us are catching up with family and friends over the summer. Some people we haven't seen since before lockdown. A natural way of celebrating our newfound freedom is to have a meal together; it might be in the pub or a restaurant or round at each other's homes.

I was at a wedding celebration last week. As one of the other guests said to me. "It's just so good to be doing something normal". Indeed, it was.

Eating together as a family or as friends or as a church strengthens our relationships and that is good for our sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Today's Gospel is the last of the readings from John that follow on from the feeding of the five thousand and in which Jesus declares himself to be the "bread of life". Over these last couple of weeks, we've looked at what Jesus meant by these words.

We noted that he called himself the "bread of Life" because bread was as much a staple food then as it is today. When Jesus talks about being the "bread of life" he is offering to satisfy our spiritual needs rather than our physical needs. When we eat ordinary bread we will be hungry again but those who eat the bread that Jesus offers will never be hungry again.

However, we also learnt that if we want Jesus to satisfy our spiritual needs then we must sincerely turn to him. We often look in the wrong places for spiritual satisfaction. We think that we will find fulfilment or happiness in material things such as money, status, power, or in acquiring more and more stuff, a new house, a new kitchen, a new car, exotic foreign holidays for example. These will give us a hit, but it soon wears off and we crave more because none of these things can fill the gap inside us for long. "The God shaped hole" as it's been called.

We've learnt that if we want Jesus to satisfy our spiritual needs we must recognise where we've been going wrong, say sorry and then accept his forgiveness. That way Jesus can fill us with his grace and love, and we can experience his joy day after day until we finally rest in our eternal home.

In the Gospel this week, Jesus said, "Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Some of Jesus' hearers were horrified.

They took him literally and asked each other, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" and they were very angry at Jesus. There were strict dietary rules and certain foods were forbidden. Blood was thought to contain the life force of the animal and was sometimes offered to God as a sacrifice.

They were totally baffled by his reference to eating his flesh and drinking his blood. But we know that Jesus is referring to his sacrifice on the cross.

When we think about the body and blood of Christ we think about the bread and wine of Communion and of the words that Jesus said to his disciples at the last Supper as he passed

around the bread and the wine. "This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" "This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me."

It's interesting to note that there is no account of the institution of Holy Communion in John's version of the Last Supper. It only appears in the Last Supper stories of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Some people believe that the account of the feeding of the five thousand in John and these sayings of Jesus following that event about being the bread of life and in particular that "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.", are John's equivalent.

A meal that many of us missed during lockdown was the sharing in Holy Communion with our fellow Christians. Watching online isn't the same and certainly for me to celebrate alone is an anathema.

There are different ways of understanding HC in the Anglican Church:

- Some regard it as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice for us. The broken bread symbolising his body broken on the cross and the wine a symbol of the blood shed for us.
- Some regard it as a remembrance as we recall the event of the last supper and use the words of institution that Jesus gave us as he spoke of his death and the promise of eternal life.
- Others believe that somehow, mysteriously the blessed bread and wine reveal the real presence of Christ being truly with us as we receive communion.

However, we understand it, every time we receive Holy Communion we are reminded that we are part of a larger family of believers. A family that spans across time and space. It is something we share and have in common. It joins us all together and to Christ himself. It reminds us that we have a mission in the world and we have been empowered by Christ to go out and serve the world in his name.

We will only do that effectively if we are fed by him through worship, prayer, bible reading and regular communion to nourish our souls just as bread nourishes our bodies. If we neglect these important means of being fed by Jesus our spiritual life will suffer, wither and eventually die. But if we work at maintaining that close relationship with him our spiritual life will grow strong and still be going strong when our physical bodies fail us and we come to the end of lives. The promise Jesus gives to his followers is that of eternal life. Eternal life doesn't just start when we die but when we begin to fully know Christ. This is an offer to us and to everyone. Living a full life today through the power of the living God, opening our hearts to him and allowing him to change us to be the people he intends us to be. That is good news!

Amen