

Sunday, August 2, 2015

Jesus and the disciples have just finished feeding the five thousand. The disciples left by boat and Jesus joined them on the sea; he got into the boat. They all crossed over to Capernum together.

When daylight came, the crowd that was on the other bank saw that Jesus and the disciples were not there. The people all got into boats and crossed over to Capernum to go looking for Jesus. They questioned Jesus as to when he had crossed the sea. He reminded them that they had followed him to fill their stomachs with bread but that physical bread would not satisfy them. He informed them that the manna which their ancestors had eaten in the desert came down from God, their heavenly father, and not from Moses. God's bread comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

Then he told them that he was the bread of life; “whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never thirst”. The bread of life is not a physical bread that fills our stomachs and can rot and become inedible. The bread of life is believing in God and learning how to follow Jesus by being and doing what God would have us do.

What does God want us to do in life? We need to do what God calls us to do and not to do things deliberately that are wrong. That means that we must pray often to God, asking for direction and guidance. Not just going off on a tangent to do what is easy or at hand.

Bread is available to everyone on this planet; it represents the basic foods of life. In some cultures it may be rice or pasta. This earth can produce more than enough food for everyone to eat his or her fill and then some. But some of us get greedy or anxious and want to store up extra food for ourselves. We want to save food for ourselves when others around the world are in need. We want to fill our freezers full of food for tomorrow. Why is it that in the West, so many people are overweight but in other parts of the earth, people regularly die of hunger? Why do we spend so much money on frivolous things but cannot bring ourselves to part with money to feed the world's hungry? The Romans called it “Bread and circuses”. Feed the masses and entertain them and they will not notice that the condition of their lives is so poor.

Think of the sin of it all, the lack of trust, the blindness, the lack of understanding, the lack of love. We

can and must do better.

There are more things in life than the bread of this world; the things which amuse us or entertain us; the pleasures of the flesh. But these things have fleeting value. The enduring qualities in this life which we need to share with others, like love, patience, understanding and kindness are part of the “bread of Life”. Bread can spoil and rot but these qualities which come from God are enduring and everlasting. Jesus took an ordinary loaf of bread to illustrate that point; he broke it and shared it with everyone present, saying the bread represented his body, broken for us. Ordinary peasant people could understand his story because he kept it simple. Yet it penetrated their hearts because they could see the truth of his words.

Jesus took ordinary bread to show that we are all one people. When we partake of communion, there are no barriers to participating; all are one, one body in Christ. The symbol of bread unites all of us in Christ’s body. We are one in the Lord. When we sit down to eat at a community supper, we are all one in the Lord, gathering and uniting in one purpose to do God’s will. That is the kingdom of God, what Jesus came on earth to tell us about. He came so that we might all become one great community, looking out for our neighbour.

Where people gather under duress, during war or oppression or discrimination or exploitation, by sharing the bread of life we eliminate all those barriers and become one body.

Where people are imprisoned for their faith, the bread and cup symbolize the One who was rejected by the people and has become the chief cornerstone.

Where people are affluent, the bread and cup beckons us to share our food with others.

When a congregation is isolated by devastation or war, the bread and cup become symbols that unite us with Christians around the world.

Sometimes God calls us to do what is difficult but with God beside us every step of the way, we can succeed.

The bread of life is the food that sustains us on the journey of life. We must prepare and pack carefully for that journey. The food we take should nourish and sustain us in many different circumstances. Can the bread of life that Christ offers us do that? Does it nourish our soul? Does it help us live out the covenant relationship with God all our days? Does it offer us kindness, patience, humility, forbearance,

love, forgiveness and peace? These are the qualities that Jesus embodied. Do our lives reflect this same mix of gifts?

Earthly security is a fiction. No one can become safe from war, famine, storms or accidents. It doesn't mean that we opt out of pension plans or throw away opportunities to invest in our future but it does mean that the things which are physical are temporary and the bread of life is eternal. When we participate in communion and we hear that "this bread is Christ's body, broken for you", those words should comfort and support us no matter what we face. When we pray, "Our Father who art in heaven.....give us this day our daily bread", we do not pray for food for the next 3 months; we pray for just enough to get us through today. We do not pray to be given a freezer full of food. One loaf is enough for today. We cannot live more than one day at a time. So we do not need food for more than just today.

Let us learn to live in the present for that is all we have. Let us be very grateful for all the blessings of today. Let us enjoy our daily bread and be prepared to give to others generously. Let us live the lives that God has called us to live: to act kindly and walk softly every day , thinking of others and not ourselves. Amen.