



### Call to Worship.

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

### STF 608

All praise to our redeeming Lord,  
who joins us by his grace,  
and bids us, each to each restored,  
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;  
and, gathered into one,  
to our high calling's glorious hope  
we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,  
we all delight to prove;  
the grace through every vessel flows,  
in purest streams of love.

E'en now we think and speak the same,  
and cordially agree;  
con centred all, through Jesu's name,  
in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,  
the common peace we feel,  
a peace to sensual minds unknown,  
a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below  
in Jesus be so sweet,  
what heights of rapture shall we know  
when round his throne we meet!

### Prayers of adoration and confession .

Lord God, we seek your presence. You are the bread of life to us, sustaining, protecting and comforting. We know that when we call out to you, you are near. You hold us up when we are falling. You are just in all your ways, and kind in all your doings. You have never failed us. Saving God, we want to proclaim your power, knowing that your words are faithful and your deeds are gracious. We are in awe of your wondrous works. Still-speaking God, we want to listen for your voice. Speak to us in scripture, song, and silence. Show us the way to love, not just in word and speech, but in truth and action. Show us where you want to lead us. **Amen.**

### Prayer of Confession

God of love, you created us to love you and one another. We confess that we have sometimes limited that love to words, and failed to make that love real by our actions. We have failed to recognise Christ in the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the needy, and the sick. Too often, we have turned away from your presence, failing to share what we have with our brothers and sisters in need. Forgive us. Turn our hearts, and guide us to follow in your ways anew. **Amen**

### Gospel Reading: John 6:24-35

Once the crowd realised that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boat and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." 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.

### Reflection:

How hungry are you when hunger strikes? Would a slice of bread be enough to satisfy?  
My Dad often came out with funny memorable phrases. For example when he was hungry he would say, "I am so hungry I could eat a scabby horse between two bread vans!". I guess bread vans dates it! I also recall how my school pal learnt his Mums Coop number and thought it was magic as he ordered all manner of goodies for free, as he thought; for his pals from the Coop bread van! Oops he soon learned the truth! What do you hunger for?

We are part of a consumer culture and getting something for free is definitely an attractive option. Marketing plays on it with ploys like, 'Buy one get one free.' Slogans that fuel the fires of greed and the fears of missing out, FOMO!

The people who kind of stalk Jesus to Capernaum had been part of the multitude that had been fed miraculously from a few loaves and fish. They certainly were suffering from FOMO, they wanted more of what was going for free! To be fair they lived in a harsher world than we do. A world where you lived, 'hand to mouth'. Jesus challenges what they are really seeking for? 'Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you".'

Bread is not a major part of our meal nowadays. A savoury main ingredient is more important like meat fish or a vegetarian option. Some people cannot tolerate the gluten in bread flour and they may consume gluten free alternatives. We have such a plethora of bread or bread alternative options to choose from. Others may well avoid this carbohydrate rich part of our diet.

However in Jesus' time bread was the most important part of the meal. And yet the Israelites of the time of Christ's were frugal eaters. Indeed until about just over a hundred years ago, frugality in eating was more imposed than chosen and not just in biblical lands. Worldwide food was more scarce and less convenient than today. It's availability was seasonable, and all the elements needed to be made from scratch, including hauling in the water from wells in certain locations. If you have seen any of the Morrison's 125 year anniversary advertisements, it's interesting to see how buying has changed. From overloaded shopping trolleys of today, to the lady who in the stores earlier days, would select just a slice of a new product to put in her small personal willow shopping basket.

Bread was the essential, basic food in the time frame that our Bible reading is set. So basic was it that in Hebrew "to eat bread" and "to have a meal" was the same thing. Bread was treated with great respect and many rules existed to preserve that reverence. Any crumbs of over the size of an olive were expected to be gathered, and never simply discarded. Bread was never to be cut, but always broken. The poor ate barley bread, the rich bread made of wheat. Barley or wheat grains were ground between two millstones, almost always by women, and this was done at home. From this the flour and then the dough was made and worked in needing troughs. The bread was always made into round shapes. Bread had a very poor keeping quality and would only last for a day or two before becoming mouldy and stale. A great deal of difference to how we think of bread today. I guess if we gave a chunk of bread to the next person who said "what's for dinner?", it wouldn't be as well received as the bread in Jesus' time. And yet bread does have a hunger satisfying attribute. But is that what people are hungry for?

We all have hearts that are hungry for something. I came across an author who said that every person is looking for answers to three fundamental questions:

Who am I?

Where do I fit in?

What am I here for?

These questions of identity, belonging and purpose can be thought of as hungers that we have. We can also be hungry for things like acceptance, self-worth, peace, rest, hope, and the list goes on.....So what are you hungry for?

I loved the phrases my Dad came out with. They speak to me of his sense of humour and fun. How he always tried to get close to us and to often lighten a difficult moment. Honestly though the thought of physically eating any animals between any motorised vehicles is less than appealing. I preferred my pals choice, or do I?

What do you think might be the food that satisfies and doesn't spoil today? I am not talking about food with additives to prolong shelf life. Even that eventually spoils.

One of my favourite old time songs is the song, 'Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)". It's a popular song written by Irving Berlin and used in the 1954 film White Christmas. The song arose from a personal experience of Berlin when his doctor suggested he try "counting his blessings" as a way to deal with insomnia brought on by stress. The lyrics to the song focus on blessings as those things that time can't erode or erase, the love of a young family. The song also asks you to think of what you have now in comparison to what you've lacked in the past. What blessings can you recall that have filled your life and given you satisfaction and happiness? Lots of questions for you to think about today.

The initial question in today's gospel reading is very odd. "Rabbi, when did you get here?" That's a strange question to ask, almost like a question they didn't need to know the answer too. It's a kind of 'ice breaker' because the real question that they want to ask is not easy to put. They have had a touch of Gods gracious provision and they wanted more. They had followed him in the first instance 'because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick'. (6:2). The people after the feeding wanted to make him their king, how? By force! And so he withdrew and later he and the disciples in the evening, slip away to the other side of the lake, putting about six miles between them and the crowd.

We are one month on from the general election and yet we probably still recall the things that made us choose the party we wanted to vote for and the promises that they made. We have made our choice

democratically and certainly not by force. It would be a strange choice to make someone the leader of our nation by force and all because we misinterpreted their actions and words. We wrongly believed they could magically produce everything that will give us everything for our needs. However this is what the crowd intended for Jesus. He would heal the sick and fill their larders. The gospel reading is quite sad and frustrating in that no matter how Jesus tries to explain to the crowd, they still don't seem to understand. The whole of John 6 is about how people want Jesus to give them what they want for themselves and their material needs. There is a kind of grasping greediness in their demands and the whole debate ends in grumbling and dereliction on their part, when they feel that their demands are not being met. They just don't get it, that Jesus is offering them a richer fuller quality of life that transcends the confines of this world, but also demands a change of heart from them. From inward thinking to looking at the world through the eyes of faith and reaching out to fulfil the work of God in sacrifice and service.

When we think of our lives in Christ we know that it is a relationship that will never fade or fall away. Jesus is our constant companion and guide. We might forget him but he never lets us go. Our lives are certainly richer and fuller with him. Another old song I remembered from Sunday school days is, "with Christ in the vessel we can smile at the storm." He is the bread of life that will satisfy our deepest needs when we believe and trust in Him. For our hungers to be satisfied we need a change of heart. As Charles Wesley wrote: 'O for a heart to praise my God, A heart from sin set free..A heart in every thought renewed. And full of love divine, Perfect and right and pure and good, A copy, Lord, of Thine.

### STF 252

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,  
the Bread of Life for the world am I.  
The Bread of Life for the world am I,  
the Bread of Life for the world am I.'  
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,  
the Bread of Life for the world am I.'

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Vine,  
the true and fruitful Vine am I.  
The true and fruitful Vine am I,  
the true and fruitful Vine am I.'  
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Vine,  
the true and fruitful Vine am I.'

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Way,  
the true and living Way am I.'

The true and living Way am I,  
the true and living Way am I.'  
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Way,  
the true and living Way am I.'

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Light,  
the one true Light of the world am I.  
The one true Light of the world am I,  
the one true Light of the world am I.'  
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Light,  
the one true Light of the world am I.'

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,  
the Resurrection and the Life am I.  
The Resurrection and the Life am I,  
the Resurrection and the Life am I.'  
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,  
the Resurrection and the Life am I.'

**Prayers for others...** based on prayers from the Trussell trust, food bank organisation.

Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' This is the promise of God to whom we now pray.

Loving God, Thank you for your love and kindness. You are a God of mercy, justice, and compassion, and yet we acknowledge that these qualities are not always reflected in our lives, in our community, and in our society.

Help us to respond to suffering, poverty, and hunger in ways that usher in your kingdom: to see people as you see them, to share your loving-kindness in the darkest situations, to challenge injustices that trap people in poverty, to build a future that sets people free, so that everyone can share in the fullness of life that Christ offers to us all. **Amen**

Father God, You are the source of life and hope. So many people in our country are facing hunger and poverty: We pray for change and transformation. Thank you for the work of our food banks, be with those trying to make a difference between the haves and have not. We pray for a world where food banks will become redundant, food poverty a distant memory and food waste a thing of the past.

**God of love, hear our prayer.**

Lord, You draw close to us in our troubles. So many people are anxious about how they will afford to put food on the table and pay their bills: We pray for provision, comfort, and hope. We pray for our newly elected government that they will be given the wisdom to make the best choices to provide for the needs of all people in our country.

**God of love, hear our prayer.**

You are a God of kindness and compassion. So many people feel alone in their difficulties and unable to ask for help. People try to fill their hunger's with wrong things. Help us to reach out to one another with love and encouragement. To see and offer appropriate support and assistance.

**God of love, hear our prayer.**

Father, You love justice and mercy, Strengthen us to challenge and change systems that lock people in poverty So that everyone can share in the fullness of life. We thank you for agencies that work with the disadvantaged and those in financial distress. We pray for our commercial institutions, that they might find ways to encourage people to be satisfied with what they can afford. To seek to live in a world that uses its resources responsibly and not to seek to attract people into lifestyles beyond their means.

**God of love, hear our prayer. Amen**

We pray for those whose daily need for healthy food, clean water and proper shelter goes unmet, and for those misusing what they have in the vain pursuit of pleasure. Feed them with all the good things of Christ for life now and in eternity.

**God of love, hear our prayer.**

Have mercy on those whose lives have been broken by violence and crime. Feed them with hope and a new life in Christ.

**God of love, hear our prayer.**

Draw near to those who are sick or sorrowing with healing and consolation. We pray particularly for those known personally to us.

Heavenly Father: thank you for sending your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to be the Bread of Life for the world. Forgive us for elevating earthly appetites above devotion to you. Feed us with the knowledge of Christ so that we might find ways of service and gratitude in his name.

**God of love, hear our prayer. Amen.**

**Let us say the Lord's Prayer.**

**STF 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.

**The Blessing:**

When the journey is long and we hunger and thirst, Bread of Life, you sustain us.  
When the road is hard and our bodies weak Bread of Life, you heal us.  
When our spirits are low and we can't carry on Bread of Life, you revive us.  
When we offer our hand in love and in service Bread of life, you bless us.  
When the challenge is great and the workers are few Bread of Life, you empower us.  
When the victory is won and we see your face Bread of Life, you will rejoice with us!  
May your faithful blessing be with us this day and always. **Amen.**



1950's Birmingham bread van.