

Call to Worship Psalm 34: 8-10

Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.
Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.
The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Prayer

Jesus, my living bread, I come wanting to feed on your word.
Jesus, you offer life to the world, eternal life, raising us up on the last day.
Keep me hungry for you, with the anticipation of a feast of the finest food – food that brings life. Amen.

Hymn StF 254 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God
And His righteousness,
And all these things
Shall be added unto you,
Allelu, alleluia.

Refrain
Alleluia, alleluia
Alleluia, alleluia

Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word

That proceeds from the mouth of God
Allelu, alleluia.

Refrain
Ask, and it shall be given unto you.
Seek and ye shall find.
Knock and it shall be opened unto you
Allelu, alleluia.

Refrain

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Prayers

Adoration O God, your Word became flesh and lived among us.
Thank you that you are present with us right now, dwelling in our hearts and our homes.
Holy God, you are worthy to be praised. Holy Spirit, we worship you.
Living bread, we adore you. Amen.

Confession

Forgive us Lord when our hospitality is too narrow; at your table, all really are welcome.
Forgive us when we do not share our bread with those who are hungry;
hungry for food and hungry for you.
Forgive us when, without a thought, we waste or do not cherish the bread we do have.
Jesus, the Living Bread, forgive us, feed us and heal us.

Pause

Jesus does indeed welcome all at his table, where forgiveness, new life and new beginnings are for all who want to receive them. Thanks be to God. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Introduction

Bread – It's such a common, everyday commodity that often we don't give it much thought.
How many different kinds of bread can you think of?
The word 'companion' has its roots in bread.....com = with, pan = bread; someone with whom you eat bread, someone with whom you share not just the physical food but all the other nourishment that comes from gathering around the meal table.

In households in Jesus' time, breadmaking was a labour intensive, daily activity, because bread featured prominently in every meal...it was the staple food of life. To have no bread was to go hungry. Bread features in both the scripture readings today.

Readings: Proverbs 9: 1-6 Wisdom personified stands in the prominent places in town to call guests to the feast she has prepared, those who perhaps are otherwise overlooked:

Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars.
She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table.
She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city,
'Let all who are simple come to my house!'
To those who have no sense she says, 'Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.
Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight.'

John 6: 51-58 Gospel writer expands Jesus' 'I am the bread of life' saying, linking it forward with his crucifixion; Jesus' flesh & blood, his body broken on the cross, his blood poured out in sacrifice for the gift of eternal life to humanity:

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.'

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live for ever.'

Reflection

There's something very special about sharing food with others....the hospitality, welcome, sharing, tasting, perhaps encouraging others to taste, sharing of ourselves with each other in conversation, holding what is precious together.

Our family is very widespread across the UK and the world but it's very special when we are able to come together and it usually involves food. I come away from such times being filled with far more than slow-roasted pulled pork and strawberry pavlova!

In the passage from Proverbs, Wisdom, personified as a woman, has set a banquet in her house for all those who would accept her invitation to come in and eat what she has prepared,sustaining food for those who seek to walk in God's ways of righteousness.

In the previous chapter, Wisdom offers to share prudence, intelligence, truth, righteous words, knowledge, discretion, strength, insight and justice, things that are represented by the bread and wine at Wisdom's banquet, with those who will listen, and thereby gain honour.

The hospitality of God towards humanity is a recurring biblical theme; a chance to sit together and chew things over, sometimes literally and sometimes figuratively.

In Ch6 of John's gospel, where our 'bread of life' reading comes from today, begins with the feeding of the 5000, a literal example of God's hospitality.

The whole of Ch 6, apart from a short passage about Jesus walking on the water, is devoted to bread to illustrate the relationship Jesus has with people as something that is life-giving and sustaining, just as bread is. The verse that comes right in the middle of the chapter is this:

Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'

Jesus emphasis has changed from talking literally about bread, the bread that fed the crowds and the manna that fed the Israelites in the desert, to talking about himself as bread, come down from heaven, giving life to the world, giving eternal life to those who will consume it.

This gets all a bit too much for the Jewish leaders who are listening as Jesus teaches in the synagogue in Capernaum. They struggle, and who doesn't?, to make the jump from talking about literal bread to understanding bread as Jesus' flesh and blood, the substance of his very self, as something to be consumed spiritually, which will subsequently mean that a person will not die.

This is an amazing claim on Jesus' part!

'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood.... have eternal life.....abide in me and I in them.

Jesus invites people to take his very self into their lives as fully as consuming and digesting bread and wine, which is exactly what we're doing when we share in Holy Communion. Jesus is not only the host who invites us to his table to eat, as Wisdom does in Proverbs, but is also the living bread and the wine poured out, his body broken and his blood shed for us on the cross.

At Holy Communion we take the bread and wine, symbols of his flesh and blood, into our bodies, into our very being; Jesus becoming one with us as we become one with him. It is a sacramental moment, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet which awaits all who put their trust in Jesus.

There is a difference though between eating at a banquet and eating an everyday meal, a TV supper! Eating our staple foods is something we do every day.

In 1st Century Palestine, making bread for meals was a daily activity involving hard work. For us the weekly or daily shopping trip is necessary to put food on the table; being fed and nourished is an essential part of the daily routine, essential for living.

Whilst we may celebrate a wonderful, special meal of bread and wine with Jesus at Communion, the Bread of Life is no less necessary for our spiritual nourishment and sustaining every day.

How will you consume your portion of the Living Bread, and share it with others in the coming days?

Prayers for others

Lord, we come to you asking for you to fill us and feed us today. There are so many ways in which we are empty and need your nourishment.

Jesus, bread of life, feed us and nourish us with yourself.

We pray for those who are hungry, especially in parts of the world where there is not enough food. For those on the brink of starvation. Particularly we pray for places which come up in the news and then are not mentioned because other news takes their place.

We pray for those who have enough to feed their families until the rains fail and the crops die. Strengthen and resource organisations seeking to give people the bread they need.

We pray for people in refugee camps or homeless on our own streets. We thank you for our local Foodbanks, soup kitchens and hostels, serving those who are hungry; give courage to those who need them but feel ashamed to ask for help.

Jesus, bread of life, feed us and nourish us with yourself.

Lord Jesus, your heart of compassion aches for the pain of the world, so we pray for all those who need the bread of comfort in their lives, some known to us and many known only to you.

In the stillness, we hold before you the people and situations you have laid on our hearts to pray for, knowing that you care about each one.....

Jesus, bread of life, feed us and nourish us with yourself.

We bring to mind those who are spiritually hungry. We pray for the many people of our land who have never had the opportunity to meet with Jesus or anyone who loves him.

We pray for those Christians who are persecuted for their faith yet still remain constant, trusting that you will supply their needs.

Jesus, bread of life, feed us and nourish us with yourself.

Lord, I thank you for the church community. Thank you for the opportunities we have to be fed by your word and our worship. We pray for all those who enable worship to happen each week.

Jesus, bread of life, feed us and nourish us with yourself.

Finally, Lord, in the stillness, I bring my own personal needs to you. Thank you that you care about every detail of my life, even the ones I think you don't notice.

Please give me food for my journey this week. Nourish me with your presence in every situation, particularly those unexpected moments when I need extra help. Help me know that I have met with you and have been fed by you in this service.

Jesus, bread of life, feed us and nourish us with yourself. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 303 I know that my Redeemer lives

I know that my Redeemer lives;
what joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting Head.

He lives to bless me with His love,
He lives to plead for me above,
He lives my hungry soul to feed,
He lives to help in time of need.

He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to lead me safely there.

He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, my Saviour, still the same.
What joy the blest assurance gives,
"I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Blessing & sending

Having been fed by you, Jesus the living bread, help us to share you so that others may be nourished.
Filled with your Holy Spirit, guide us as we offer your life to others.
Sealed with the promise of eternal life, Holy God, give us your love to share with the world.
Amen