

4th August: John 6, Ex 16 and Eph 4: Feeding on the Bread of Life

On Monday this last week, I had lunch with a friend by the lake. It was beautiful: warmth, a nice breeze, and blue, see-through water. Then up came another friend. A **swan**. A big, beautiful swan. And he sat there, looking very reproachfully at us, as if to say “you really ought to be giving me some of your **bread**”.

I could see right through him. He just wanted the bread. Jesus would know this feeling. I’m not sure swans were on Lake Galilee, but Jesus sees right through the people coming after him. He knows exactly why they are there.

“You are not here looking for me because you saw **signs**, but because you **ate your fill** of the loaves”.

They are just like the swan. Jesus knows 100% that these people saw the feeding of the 5000. And rather than think “how did he do that?” or “what does this mean, that he’s doing things like in Moses’ time?”, they are thinking “**free food!**”

It’s the same old story that Moses saw played out. God’s people are **led from slavery**, from a life of **subjugation** and **oppression**, into **liberty**...and the as soon as their tummies rumbled, they are saying “I’d rather be enslaved but fat, than hungry and free”.

Yet out of his **abundant goodness**, God pours on them food. The psalmist says that the Lord God fed them the **bread of angels** – the Manna – and that God effectively **rained meat** on them in the form of quail!

I’d like to point out that Quail are not Pigeons – we have had a few pigeons come in and as some of you saw, I had to throw one out last week, but while that pigeon lived to coo another day, we could have eaten it, but it still wouldn’t have been a patch on quail! Quail produce many eggs and have better meat than pigeons.

God provided them for his people, whom he had **redeemed from slavery and from subjugation**, and he set them **free to be his people**, to flourish under his guidance and **show the world the character and nature of the true God**.

But note how the people responded to all that: they quickly moaned about food. They had just been rescued through miraculous plagues, a sea that parted, seen a pillar of fire and cloud, and very soon they were taking too much bread and quail, and ignoring God’s instructions.

They somehow missed out what had just happened to them! Just like Jesus’ people. They had just been through the feeding of the 5000, and now they are after this mobile McDonalds. Jesus to them is a food dispensary, and he has to start a conversation to correct this.

So Jesus tells them: put your **effort** and **work** into **getting hold of food** that **lasts** and **produces eternal life**. You can get this from the Son of Man (a reference to Jesus). Indeed,

God is doing work, and **God's work** is to help **draw you** to **belief** in the **One whom God** has sent. That means, **draw you to be loyal to Jesus.**

They say “what sign are you going to give us?” – completely forgetting the feeding of the 5000 and the other miracles Jesus has done – or perhaps deliberately goading Jesus to do another “trick”. **They are totally missing the point:** John's gospel doesn't talk about miracles of Jesus, it talks about **SIGNS**. Jesus is not doing tricks to impress people, his signs are pointing them to some facts: God is here; the Messiah has come; the new age of God's Kingdom is beginning.

And the people say “Give us this bread that does not perish!”

And Jesus says “**I AM the bread of life!**”

Let us realise that bread in that ancient world was more than just an addition to a meal; it was an almost ever-present reality of life. It was “**the meal**”, the core food of humanity. Jesus was saying to them that **He is the core food for all people**, and **on Him we must learn to feed**, because His teachings never perish.

Rabbis and ancient teachers of the law talked about the **Guidance** and **Law** of Moses as **bread** and **food given by God**. So what Jesus means here is that, **for life, we need to believe and trust in Jesus, and feed on his teachings and words.**

If we reach out to Jesus, and **ask for him to forgive us, and accept his offer to take the controls of our lives**, then we begin the process of “feeding” on him, the true food and bread of life. And his words and teaching, expressed in the Bible and the gospels, show us and guide us on how to live.

This is where our **Ephesians** passage comes in. Paul is writing to the Ephesians and the churches in that area about how they are to live as God's people, and why they are to live as holy people.

He says lead a **worthy life if you are called by God to serve him**. Has anyone here served in the military? What happens if you go out, get drunk, vandalise houses, scare ladies and wreck the town?

You probably get **court-martialled!** You are no longer completely your own. In my last job, there was a contractual clause saying that if I went out and did things that brought shame on the brand of the company, they could fire me.

If we have been called by God to serve him, then we are called to obedience and to uphold the brand image! **We are called to represent God and God's character to this world.**

Paul then starts to outline that. Be humble. Gentle. Patient. Hold each other close. Seek unity and peace, don't divide. God is one. There is one baptism. One Lord Jesus. So don't divide, hold close together in obedience to Jesus.

Paul is addressing a church where there seems to be a bit of self-assertion going on, a number of people saying that they know best and we all ought to follow them. What strikes me though is the first thing Paul calls them to do, and it's not love!

What is it: it's **humility** and **gentleness**.

Humility. Really, this whole church project is **not about us or about our agendas. It is about the extension of Jesus Christ and the rule of his kingdom, so that all people might give their allegiance and loyalty to Jesus, who will return all to God.** So be humble.

So Paul reminds us: you have a high calling! So behave like it!

He then outlines ministries in church: **apostles**, who were sent to start churches, like missionaries today; **prophets**, who speak the truth as seen by God; **evangelists**, who have the gift of sharing their faith; **pastors**, who are great at caring for others; **teachers** who can help us understand the scriptures.

We are all of these! But we are also more one thing than another. I don't think I'm a good evangelist, but it doesn't mean that's not my mission too.

And Paul explains why we have these gifts: they equip us to **minister to other people**. To **build up** the Body, the **church**; and to bring us to a **unity in our faith**; and to help lead us to **better knowledge of Jesus**.

We live in a world where there are many ideas blowing around. There are many new doctrines that catch the breeze and become the taste of the day. **But we are called to hold fast to the faith of the church, a faith that is derived from and rooted in Jesus Christ.**

So as Paul says, **speak the truth in love**. Be gentle and humble, listen to other people, but also hold to the truth. And the **truth is found in the bread of life**.

By **eating that bread, which means learning from Jesus**, reading and understanding his words, we become humbler and work to benefit everyone.

The more we feed on the words of Jesus, the more we become effective in ministering to others; the more we find unity, and learn our calling and mission in God's kingdom. **So make sure you spend time in the gospels every day, learning about Jesus, for that is how we feed on the bread of life.**