

SERMON 5 AUGUST 2018

Why are we here? Why aren't we, like so many others at this moment, sitting in a café in the sun, eating brunch, drinking coffee with family and friends, or even alone, reading? It is one of the markers of our affluent society that we do that, and, don't get me wrong, I am very happy to be part of that. It is about affluence. When I was growing up there was little money to spare and people just didn't go off to a café unless it was a special occasion. In those days, relationships were sustained more at home: people dropped in for a cup of tea when they were going past on their way to the shops perhaps. Nowadays we get in our cars and drive straight to the supermarket car park. Still, whether it is sitting at the kitchen table or in our lounge room or at a café, food and drink are gathering points. And if you don't have anyone to share it with, or you have no place to call home and barely enough money to feed yourself and your family then you know very well the physical, mental and spiritual effects of that lack.

Jesus fed people: he offered them food for their bodies and food for their souls and they came flocking to him, especially, as we have heard, because he had met the physical needs that are always so dominating. What an amazing thing the crowd had witnessed as they were all fed with the 5 little loaves and 2 fish as they sat on the grass around Jesus. And there were even left-overs! (Though I gather, in the version Andy told you last week, there weren't!). Here was someone who they wanted to keep in their lives! Here was someone who could change things for the better! So, they watched where he went in order to keep close to him. They saw that he went up the mountain alone and saw that his disciples went off in the boat without him, so they waited. But, the next day, they discovered

that somehow Jesus and his disciples were together again across the lake at Capernaum. “When did you get here?” they asked. And I am sure they also wondered “how?”.

They want more of what Jesus could do, but especially of his ability to give them food. That was the bottom line for them. We can understand it. Wayside Chapel, Exodus, Parramatta Mission and so many others know that when people are hungry there is no point in trying to have deep conversations until they are fed. Jesus knew this with the crowd back then. It's always a temptation that can dominate as people want the physical satisfaction and get stuck in that. It's not just those for whom hunger is a reality. It becomes a widespread thing that we see everywhere as we want more and more of what we think gives us satisfaction and happiness. It can become an addictive end in itself.

Jesus always pointed to the God-things that offered more. He was showing a way, not just an end. There is always so much more if we can trust in it, trust that we don't lose out on the satisfaction we know if we look at everything more widely and let go of outright hold on that. Jesus' followers were continually having their minds stretched, their understanding of what was possible broken down. Back then it was mind-blowing for all the people that there seemed to be no barriers to what Jesus could do – from healing people, to seeing that there was enough food, to somehow getting across the Lake. There was then, and for many, still remains, a lingering question in their minds about how he could do these things. It was hard to believe even though they wanted to and they certainly wanted him to stick around and have more of what he was offering. Was this really from God, and as close to them as Jesus was?

They wanted more proof before believing him when he said he could really satisfy their deep hunger, for ever.

The questions don't change for us. We want to have Jesus in our lives. We want to be involved with him. We know that when we come close to him we feel a deep resonance in our souls. It tells us "this is good! This is true! Let's hold onto it!". I imagine this as like standing in a doorway. It's a doorway from a place that's not quite satisfactory but comfortable in a limited way. The next place is unseen but, we are told offers us amazingly much more. To step across the threshold means giving assent to some unknown God-based things that seem so different from the way we normally organise our lives. We are drawn on by a hunger in our souls to take that step because we know there is an unmistakable truth in Jesus, even if our minds still hold many questions about "how?". We stand on such thresholds many times in our lives, because we are always being led onwards on this journey. Sometimes we resist, pulled backwards by competing voices that tell us we can be happy enough in our known comfort. But when we do step forwards, we know how our real hunger is met.

The pivotal verse in the reading from John is "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." The crowds wanted more signs, one more thing to finally convince them. But they have been shown enough. The choice to assent and believe is about understanding that what we are looking for is not the temporary satisfaction of our physical needs but the fulfilment of the human search for truth, for relationship, for love; for spirits that then glow with the light of God's goodness and generosity. The café culture may bring delight while we sit there, but we will get up and go back to the other demands of our lives. The real nourishment comes from

something much more. Believing is not about a rational, head-directed thing, though it is not irrational either. There are countless stories that affirm it. Belief grows out of seeing what is good and life-giving – things that are indeed always around us. These come to us through Christ alone. We are invited into relationship with him, with all he offers, and through him with one another. That relationship fulfills us and so it changes us. Thus nourished, it leads us, so we may, as Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus “be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” That is what that lies ahead when we step forward in belief that Jesus is the bread of life for us and for all people. IT is more than enough.

We will gather around the table and share in the bread that God blesses to us through Christ who walked among the people and showed them the way. We cannot perfectly understand, but we know, as we take the bread and the cup, that Jesus is always engaged with us in our lives and makes God known to us at each and every step of the way. The signs are aplenty. God is with us. Thanks be to God!