**Morning Praise Sunday 8th August 2021**



**Opening prayer**

Lord Jesus, true bread from heaven, giving life and refreshment to the world, fill our lives with your goodness, fill your church with your presence, that we may live and work to your praise and glory, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, are one God, now and forever. Amen

**Confession**

God shows his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Let us then show our love for him by confessing our sins in penitence and faith. cf Romans5:8

**Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you. We are not worthy to be called your**

**Children. We turn to you again.** **Have mercy on us,** **bring us back to yourself** **as those who once**

**were dead but now have life through Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Luke 15

**Absolution**

May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  **Amen.**

#### **Bible Reading: Psalm 130**

**Reading John 6: 31, 41 – 51**

**Philip’s reflection Amazing Bread - People can Change!**

Jesus has fed the 5,000 with loaves of bread & fishes - but still there is some grumbling.

They had wanted to make Jesus a King – they totally misunderstood him & he had had to withdraw – but still the crowd followed him. Jesus was almost being mobbed by the crowd. Word had got around of a great teacher who did miracles – but the crowd wanted more.

Jesus wanted to get his real message across to the crowds. He reminded them of the Israelites in the wilderness, eating manna to survive, reminding them how God gave them manna from heaven to eat.

Then a bold claim *‘ I am the bread that came down from Heaven’*

Again more grumbling – but now a different tone – ‘How can he say that? This is the local lad, son of Mary & Joseph! How can he say that?!!!’

Some folk say, ‘A leopard can’t change its spots. People don’t really change’. But if that is the case, what is this Christianity thing really all about? What’s the point?

I have a friend who lived in his youth what might be called quite a ‘colourful life’ – he drank far too much, he fancied himself something rotten & his friends thought of him as a bit of an animal at times.

But this person decided in his 40’s that he wanted to leave this lifestyle behind to follow a more purposeful calling & trained to become a vicar. Those friends from his earlier years could not believe it – you have got to be kidding! Even when he was ordained, those friends continued to smirk at the idea of their old friend being a vicar. Even though he had completely turned his life around. Whenever they talked about him, or even when they met, they couldn’t help but say ‘remember the time when…..’ But people can change.

John Newton was a captain of a slave ship. Not only was he responsible for immense human suffering as his ‘cargo’ was transported across the ocean, but in his own words, he lived a wild life & ‘sinned with a high hand’. But he changed, and eventually did what he could to fight slavery, and at a key moment wrote to William Wilberforce telling him of his regrets for how the slaves under his command were treated, encouraging him of the importance of the abolitionist cause. It was a key moment for Wilberforce. Newton of course went on to write of ‘Amazing Grace that saved a wretch like me’.

People can change. But it’s hard, sometimes for others to acknowledge and accept change. It’s as though they don’t want to accept people can change that much. Maybe because it puts the spotlight on their own lives.

If Jesus can become someone his old friends & family hardly recognise, then we can too. We can change things about ourselves, we can become the person God wants us to be – but we have to work at it. We have to take that living bread Jesus refers to in verse 51 of our reading.

Look at this loaf. Looks tasty, doesn’t it?! It’s a sourdough loaf. Unlike most loaves we tend to eat in this country, the baker will not have made it by adding a packet of yeast to a flour and water mix. Instead they will have prepared some flour & water several days earlier, put it in in a nice warm place & then looked after it. Like this one…… And I mean really looked after it.

Twice a day, they remove half of the starter & then top it up with more flour & water. A natural yeast in the flour is encouraged to grow, alongside lots of ‘friendly’ bacteria. Then the mix is added to a normal flour & water mix, and having been left to ‘prove’ or rise, it is then baked into hopefully a lovely sourdough loaf. Hopefully. Unless the starter went wrong! But if you have a good loaf, you can share some of that saved starter mix with someone else to add to flour & water for their sourdough bread, and they can share, and so on and on…..

Bread keeps appearing in the Bible. It is called ‘leaven bread’ when it has a form of yeast in it & rises, such as a sourdough, or ‘unleaven’ bread if it is a flat bread that doesn’t rise – such as the unleaven bread the Israelites use to celebrate Passover - a time when they had to make a quick form of bread in their haste to leave Egypt while they could.

And of course at communion we take the bread & the wine as representing Jesus’ body & blood

In Matthew 13 v33 we read ‘*The kingdom of Heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in 3 measures of flour, till it was all leavened’.*

The leaven referred to is a sourdough mix. The woman added it to 3 measures of flour – that’s a lot of flour – about 18Kg (or 3 stone). That small sourdough mix changed all that flour & created flour that would rise into wonderful loaves of bread. So that small amount of sourdough mix can have a huge impact. Just as Jesus & his few initial disciples were able to change the world. Just as a small start from us, if we accept Jesus as the bread of Life - can really change us, and the lives of so many others.

Some of the earliest ‘leaven’ bread makers were the ancient Egyptians. Before that it was all flat breads. Infact the Egyptian word for bread is Aish, which literally means ‘life’.

The government in Egypt subsidizes the price of bread. When in 2008 the government removed the subsidy, people took to the streets, shouting for ‘Bread, freedom & social justice’.

A little sourdough starter can go a long way, and genuinely change the flour it is added to. People can change too. But like the sourdough starter, they need to work at it. It needs to be nurtured, & fed.

In verse 51 Jesus says *‘I am the Living bread that came down from heaven, whoever eats this bread will live forever…’* Let us eat his bread, that we might change to be more like Him. Let us nuture and feed our faith that we might also grow in Him, and so change the world. **Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

 **We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God

and makes Christ known in the world?

 **We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Prayers of intercession**

Jesus said’ *I am the bread of life, ….whoever eats this bread will live forever.’*

Lord God, giver of all good gifts, we thank you for all that satisfies and sustains us, for the life giving love you give to us. We pray for a right use of talents and gifts within your church, that gifts and possessions may neither be hoarded or squandered; that the young will be given a good example to follow. Lord make us a generous and a gracious people. Lord our God, **you are our hope and strength**

We thank you for the wonderful team spirit, demonstrations of perseverance and dedication we have seen from so many Olympians over the last two weeks. We give thanks for the many Christian athletes who have been open about their faith and trust in you. We pray for them all as they return home, some with medals and many without, that they will know their hard work and sacrifice has been acknowledge and celebrated.

Lord our God, **you are our hope and strength**

Lord of all beauty, we pray for areas that are destroyed or defaced, through flooding, fires, drought or greed and misuse of the land. We pray for those living in poverty and lives are constantly in danger, for those whose harvests will fail again this year. Help us to find the right ways to support and to equip those in greatest need, to make choices in our buying power that gives a fair price for food produced, for those who work in conservation and for those is positions of power to create policy that always remembers to support the weak. Lord our God, **you are our hope and strength.**

Lord of all hope, we pray for Afghanistan, for Nigeria and other areas of continuing conflict, give great wisdom and the desire in those in positions of influence to see mercy and justice for those who are suffering so much. We pray against those who seek to intimidate and rule through fear and violence.

Lord our God, **you are our hope and strength**

We pray for those close to despair and for peace of mind to the anxious, for those whose emotional damage makes trusting appear dangerous, for those who are ill, receiving treatment, are in hospital, recovering from surgery or suffering from long term illness….we name those whom we know before you in our hearts……. Lord our God, **you are our hope and strength.**

We pray for those whose loved ones have gone before us, for those whose loss was unexpected, for those whose loss seems overwhelming, Lord our God, may you be their hope and strength.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer *Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer:**

Live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us; let us give ourselves for each other’s good,

and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**