

BREAD OF LIFE

(Isaiah 49.13-16 and John 6.25-40)

I don't know about you but I always get a big surprise when I read the Old Testament. I expect its picture of God will be of a stern and judgemental person. But you know that image couldn't be further from the truth. The God of the Old Testament is a God of love - the same as in the New Testament. God has loved and cared for us from the beginning even when we turned away from him right to the present.

Our first reading is one of many occasions when he promises he will never leave us. He loves us like a good mother loves her baby - immensely, unreservedly and with great gentleness and even if we forget him then he still hangs onto us. Even if we lose our minds and forget who we are. He still has our name etched on his hands.

God cares for us and wants good things for us, guides us and protects us tries to keep us on the right track.

God delights to feed us - both physically and spiritually. He fed his people with manna in the wilderness when they were fleeing from the Egyptians and promised them a land flowing with milk and honey. This was the way he confirmed his presence with them We have just sung a version of Psalm 23 which wonderfully expresses God's love to us and there in the middle is this glorious feast God prepared for us.

And at the end of time God will promises a glorious banquet for his people.

At St. Mary's sharing good food is a priority. It's a way of showing that our God loves us to celebrate celebration.

Even with all this love and guidance and gifts from God we still go our own way and all sorts of misery results.

So great is God's love for us that he promised to come as a man among us and take our waywardness upon himself.

And our second reading is about God's fulfilment of that promise with Jesus - and bread. Jesus was talking to a crowd who were following him around attracted to his miracles. Seeing what else he would do. Earlier they had followed Jesus to a remote place by the Sea of Galilee but evening came and they were hungry.

So Jesus fed them - dividing a few buns and fish among the crowd - around 5,000. Then Jesus left them and went over to the other side of the Lake. The crowd were persistent and again found Jesus.

He told them straight that the reason they had come was because he had fed them and because they wanted to see if he would feed them again.

Jesus told them bluntly to concentrate on why the miracles happened and the person who caused them to happen. Miracles show God's activity and are meant to direct people to God.

Both the manna in the desert and the feeding of the 5000 were signs of God's love and care.

Jesus told us to feed the hungry. It is our Christian duty and indeed many of our aid agencies have a Christian foundation including the foodbanks.

However people have other needs. Jesus said 'man does not live by bread alone', They need to be loved, to be free from guilt, to find purpose in life and hope in dying. God made people to know, love and obey him. And that leads to the greatest need of all - the need to know God.

'As the deer pants for water so my soul pants for you O God.' Psalm 42.

Jesus is God's a greatest gift to all people.

Jesus told the crowd that he had come from heaven and as well as seeing to their physical hunger he would also give them the spiritual food that leads to eternal life. And to receive this food all that is needed is to believe Jesus when he said he came from heaven and commit to him.

The people asked for this bread and Jesus replied, 'I am the Bread of Life'. Jesus offers himself to us to meet our deepest needs.

At the Last Supper Jesus breaks the bread at the table and says, 'This is my body given for you. Take, eat'.

And what does it mean? It means we welcome the living Jesus into our lives into our bodies so that he becomes part of us and we become part of him. It means that from then on God's Spirit lives within us and he will never leave us.

When I was 18 during a Mission at Durham University I asked Jesus into my life. I have never regretted it in times of great sadness or and in difficult days as well as good times. And the result - great joy because we are free from guilt, victory over death and the privilege of growing in our knowledge of our creator and redeemer.

C.S. Lewis described it as being surprised by joy. But that is just the beginning. We are fickle we need reminding. That's why Jesus told us to break bread together to remind us of him and help us stay in communion with him and with each other.

Christians do this in all sorts of ways. Here we have a Communion service but members of the Salvation Army keep each meal as a memorial.

An acquaintance was in China 15 years ago when Christianity was forbidden saw Christians at banquets break the bread there and say, 'We remember our friend'. We could all do that.

Let us all as we eat our daily bread remember that Jesus came to earth to save us from ourselves. Let us give ourselves to him anew and learn from him the bread of life. The psalmist says 'Those who look to him are radiant their faces are never covered with shame. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.'

Just do it.