

Sunday 1st August 2021 Readings & Reflection and suggested hymns for use in church

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Readings

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

Reflection

After the feeding of the 5000 the crowd seek Jesus again, following him to Capernaum. Jesus asks them why they have come, suspecting they are seeking him for the wrong reasons after all the last time he fed them all. We are not given the crowd's answer but instead we are told Jesus urges them to seek the food of life, rather than an everyday meal. He explains that 'the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world', and the crowd ask where they can find this bread and Jesus says he is the bread! It seems a complicated passage and we need to unravel some of the language and ideas.

Jesus' message and his way of life points to a new understanding of God and a new understanding of our humanity. The latter is now being understood through the discoveries of quantum science as we find a whole new connectedness which echoes the message of Jesus. God is love, we are loved and held in love, and this love is unconditional and gracious, forgiving our faults and ill-advised decisions but at the same time urging us to grow through those experiences and learn more about what it means to be fully human. This is the bread of life, to understand ourselves and God as eternally woven within the strands of creation.

In Jesus' day there was still an understanding of heaven as being above the earth so the language the writer uses talks of the bread coming down from heaven. Today we know that heaven is not a place above the earth, but there are many different alternatives espoused. For me, heaven is not a place but a concept, shorthand for the place of God which has been revealed to be everywhere and in everyone and the sense of peace that comes from understanding and believing this is 'heaven'. So, the bread of life is to be found deep within us and in everything around us. We are fed by our understanding of creation and our place within creation, we are fed by knowing God in the way that Jesus demonstrated is possible.

Knowing God in this way opens us to a sense of calling which Paul refers to in Ephesians. A calling is an awareness of a skill or gift within us which we are to share for the benefit of others. Paul lists some gifts particular to the building up of the church but today we recognise many other callings. Indeed, anything which we have a passion for could indicate a calling if it is used creatively to help others grow in their understanding of God and their place within creation. We must ask ourselves 'what fills us with a sense of purpose and completion', what defines your understanding of who you are. The specifics will be different for every one of us, as we are all unique, but the sense will be the same, and so we can help one another to discover our calling.

Purpose and completion bring a sense of contentment, a sense of peace that comes from knowing you are doing something that helps others. Being a good listener is a calling, being a questioner or challenger is a calling, being a carer is a calling, being an organiser is a calling and the list goes on. Skills and attributes which help the world to function in a better way are all about callings. Maybe you have a hobby which you have only ever viewed as a hobby but what if you were to find a way of sharing your hobby with others. If you are passionate about something you will want to share that and in doing so others may be introduced to a new idea, and in the sharing, the communicating, other things happen which can be catalysts for change.

During Covid and the times of lockdown many people have re-connected with old hobbies or discovered new hobbies. How can we use this to build new connections and enable conversations about life? Many people have recognised a deep sense of loneliness which may have been masked by busyness, how can we help these people feel more connected? Maybe the two go together. Instead of business as usual, can we become a new expression of love within our communities and offer a place of connections and friendship through sharing interests. At Wigmore, before Covid we had a plan for a new drop-in centre offering a place for conversations and connections and using a number of interests to generate sharing together, a jigsaw table, a book swap, and crafting. We hope to start this as soon as it is possible, and we hope it will grow beyond our small beginnings as we discover the

talents and passions of all who come and enable them to share together. Sometimes people simply need a place where they can discover themselves, or even re-discover themselves.

Jesus urged people to look within themselves but sometimes fear prevents us doing that. Perhaps we know we have buried some past 'sins', or hurts and guilt, and we are reluctant or afraid to open that box but however much they are hidden they are still preventing us growing in our humanity and we do need to confront those fears. Jesus revealed the unconditional love of God, the unconditional forgiveness of God and when we remember this we will find the courage to go deep and let past experiences come to the surface. It may be painful but only by confronting these feelings can we learn from them and then allow ourselves to grow by letting them go in the love that is God.

None of us are perfect, we are all on a journey to become more fully human, to sense our connectedness more and to know ourselves as a part of God. This is what Jesus meant by looking for the bread of life. Discovering our calling, whatever it may be, is a big step on the journey and will bring a sense of purpose which we often struggle to find in the hurly burly of life. Taking time, moments of contemplation, and risking the truth within is a part of the Jesus way and we can help each other by sharing more as we journey together. This is what it means to be church. To worship God is to be a pilgrim on the road to discovery of self, sharing and helping others through our skills and gifts and giving thanks for every experience and every wonder in every day. Let us be church together for others.

Suggested Hymns

Your hand O God has guided (Edward Hayes Plumtre) - tune Thornbury

Spirit of love, you move within creation (Shirley Erena Murray) - tune Lord of the years

Breathe on me breath of God (Edwin Hatch) - tune Carlisle

Go forth and be the person in your heart (Heather Whyte) - tune Woodlands

Go forth and be the person in your heart.

Live life as one, no longer feel apart.

God's love will guide and steer you on the way,
a constant presence each and every day.

Go forth and be as Jesus to your friends,
sharing the news that God's love heals and mends.

Using the call the Spirit has revealed
to shine a light on all that fear concealed.

Go forth and be a growing child of God

Explore the world and paths before untrod.

Lifting life's stones with courage found anew
let life be lived and love become your view.

Go forth and be the person in your heart,

let prayer guide and help you play your part.

Accept the doubts and questions life may throw
in love the answers always help us grow.

Go forth and be a pilgrim in the world.

Hold out your hand let fingers be unfurled.

Learn to embrace each opportunity
and know God is there and all you see.

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