

**8<sup>th</sup> August 2021 – I am the Bread of Life: Part 2** Tim Collins

John 6:35, 41-51

For the third week, bread is the central theme of the gospel reading. Those who set the lectionary are really testing the mettle of preachers and priests up and down the country! And of those listening to them. All of us desperately trying to remember what was said last week. Trying not to repeat ourselves; trying not to get ourselves boxed into corners!

So let me begin this week, with how I ended things last week – and how our reading begins this week. Though to get the full metaphorical allusions of the sat-nav you probably had to be at Cofton last week – sorry if you missed that!

Jesus lays it out direct and straight to them: *I am the bread of life! Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...*

And this seems to be a light-bulb moment for some of those around Jesus, some of those who had witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, some of those who wondered how he had got across the Sea of Galilee without a boat; a light-bulb moment because they respond:

*“Sir, give us this bread always.”*

So, was this a resetting of the sat-nav? The beginnings of the people of Israel lifting their heads up from following all too literally the Law and setting their hearts towards God? It would be so good to think so. It would be great to be able to shout, “Allelujah – they get it; they really get it.” They’ve realised that their spiritual sat-nav has been set on the

wrong course. Time to turn around; time to put all those wrong turns, narrow lanes, and dead ends behind them. Time to read the signs and turn back to God. Oh, yes! Allelujah!

But, but, but! If only things were that simple. And, of course – they’re not.

All too soon the people are complaining. Once again, they just can’t believe that this boy from Nazareth, this boy from this nowhere place – who they saw grow up, whose mother and father they knew – this little upstart is claiming to be... Well, what exactly? Claiming to have come down from heaven? Claiming to be the bread of life? Claiming to be the water of life? Does he think he’s some kind of Godly teacher? Who does he think he is?

Well, actually, of course, he knows who he is! But **they** don’t get it. **They** don’t understand.

And so, Jesus lays it on even thicker for them. Takes them back to Israel’s travels through the wilderness; gets them to think about, to really begin to understand just what it was that was going on when the people were fed manna. As the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, they too moaned and complained – to Moses, to God. And, Jesus says, it was God’s choice to feed them; it was God’s decision to provide the bread from heaven. And at that point, the people, too, had to make a choice – to accept and believe; to eat and live; or to accept and just carry on regardless, ignoring the signs. And their ignoring the signs, their unbelief, Jesus warns, ultimately cost them their life – the loss of a life lived for ever in the presence and love of God.

And those standing before Jesus that day have the same choice – to eat, to believe and so to live. Or not. Jesus was offering again the bread from heaven – not as manna this time, but through and of himself.

At this point in the reading, we have not yet been given – been fed, if you like – the people’s reaction to all that Jesus is saying. That will come next week. So, a question? What is your reaction to what Jesus is saying? How much are you thinking about your own reaction to his words? *I am the bread of life. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.* I guess, as you start to think about those words, you will probably begin to make a connection with communion, with the Eucharist. The wafer resting in the palm of your hand – and the words of distribution:

- “The Body of Christ”
- perhaps: “The Body of Christ broken for you”
- maybe: “The Body of Christ keep you in eternal life”
- Or even, “The Bread of Heaven in Jesus Christ”

We have that instant, direct understanding; we make that connection. We know the whole story – well, we think we do, but that’s a discussion for another time.

We, then, have some idea of what Jesus is alluding to, when he declares that he is the bread of life. But what of those standing before him 2000 years ago? What connections were they making? Well, John makes it clear that there were many there that day steeped in the teaching of the Torah and the Scriptures - the Jews. And at this point it probably wasn’t Jesus’s words about being the bread of life that caused them to stop; and to think. It was probably his words declaring: “whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” This would have sent them

spinning off in all kinds of theological, spiritual and emotional directions. Because the words echo one of the great prophecies of Isaiah – a prophecy that focuses on God bringing his people back from exile. A prophecy that recognises the complete helplessness of the people of Israel. And a prophecy that expresses the great outpouring of God’s love in the words: “everyone who is thirsty come to the waters.” An invitation of total acceptance of one and all. An invitation to live a life in the presence of God.

Jesus knows this is the connection that they will make. He knows the impact that his words will have on them. He absolutely wants them – and us – to know that he is the bread of life, that he is the living waters and that anyone, anyone at all who comes to him will not be rejected. Through Jesus, through the bread from heaven, through the living waters, there is life eternal. All are welcome.

And for ‘the Jews’, that is for the temple authorities, for the Pharisees and the Sadducees - that is the problem. That is the problem that will see them plot and threaten Jesus; that is the problem that will lead Jesus to the cross. It’s not that he’s a boy from Nazareth; it’s not that he’s encouraging the people to repent and turn back to God. It’s that he’s undermining their authority, their control, their power. And they mean to cling on to that authority, control and power by whatever means, no matter who gets in their way. They’ve led the people down a road paved with law and ritual and obedience – obedience to them, not necessarily obedience to God. And Jesus is offering them – and us – a different road, a road that leads to a life lived for ever in the presence and love of God. It’s our choice. Which road will you take?

Amen