

The Words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and Life
– John 6:56-69

Except for last Sunday we have been exploring what Jesus means by being the bread of life and John continues to develop this theme.

⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

As I mentioned previously it is not clear whether John is making a eucharistic connection here but there are those who believe that he is. We may think of it in these terms and there are those, and there may be some here, although it is not C of E teaching, who believe this speaks of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the belief that the substance (though not the appearance) of the bread and wine in the Eucharist becomes Christ's real presence at the point of consecration —that it is, his body and blood. This idea led to claims of cannibalism from those who did not belong to the community of faith in the early church, and you can sort of understand it from the language used. It could of course be interpreted that way when we say at Holy Communion: the body and blood of Christ. We are not required to believe this interpretation. Just to think about this a little more, if we take the words of our Eucharistic Prayers, we acknowledge that this is about remembering Jesus' death on the cross and that it is also a memorial- we do this in remembrance of him. Look out for these in our Eucharistic Prayers.

Now let's think wider than Holy Communion. As we are blessed in that we do not only have bread in our diet so in the same way let us also consider the other ways that Jesus feeds us. There are the parables and his teaching, through the example of his life; through his passion, his journey to the Cross. It is his whole life and it is his

passion which feeds us, and the one to whom we are to look to feed our spiritual lives. As we look at these words Jesus encourages us to go deeper in not just our understanding but in our relationship to him.

The events and teaching recorded in this chapter had made it all too clear that following Jesus meant something different from anything the crowds had anticipated and even some of those who were following Jesus. Nothing is said to give us a clear indication of what the views might be, although probably it was about their expectations of a kingdom which would come to save the Jews from the Romans as was the general view. Instead, they are invited to believe, to receive Christ, to eat his flesh and drink his blood and to enter into the eternal life that He proclaimed. At first the crowd were excited by his miracle of feeding the 5,000 and folk tried to make him King. Jesus escapes. Then Jesus rebukes them for having an interest in physical concerns, not in the spiritual truths. He used the feeding of the 5,000 to give a lesson on the bread of life. These words, however, so disappointed the sensation seeking crowd that many at this point turned away. There would have been those who were disappointed that Jesus was not saying the right things in their view. They had been trying to make Jesus into their image of their expectation of the Messiah, so it became clear to them that he cannot possibly be the one they were expecting or even thought he might have been. They began to see what Jesus really stood for and they did not like it. Many turned away then, as they do today. Jesus said: "The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life". We can look for all sorts of things, chase after even, which we think will give us life but, in the end, they are like a balloon which gradually deflates. Fulfilment will come through a new job, car,

house. Self-fulfilment is very much the “in” philosophy of life. Books are written to encourage us that if I work hard enough for this, or change that, or follow that kind of life-style, life will be better, and I will achieve all that I want in this life to make it better – for me. Advertising is exactly about that. In Birkenhead we had an Aldi not far from the church. Now for those who are in the know, in the middle of Aldi, not dissimilar to Lidl, there are the aisles of interesting things which are not food. Some of our discussions would be what we had found in Aldi that week which we didn’t realise we needed until we saw it, and bought it, and whilst sometimes things were really useful, even for the church, we would laugh at our ability to succumb to the delights of Aldi. Ikea has the same kind of power in finding just what you want when you don’t even know you need it. The power of drawing us in. How many times do we go to the shop for one or two things and come away with a bag full?

“The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life”. This was just too much, too difficult for those who had begun to follow Jesus and so he asks the 12 “You don’t want to leave too, do you?” Notice it was Peter who replied: “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” It isn’t that Jesus is not interested in our physical needs, and he has shown that in healing and in feeding the crowds and I know of answers to prayer where physical needs have been provided by God, but Jesus wants people to see that our real hunger is of a spiritual nature, and we ignore the spiritual for the physical. This is why people found it difficult. Jesus did not say that discipleship was easy, in fact he said something about taking up our

cross to follow him was the only way to be a disciple. St. Paul says in Colossians 3¹⁻² “So if you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, *act* like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that’s where the action is. See things from *his* perspective.” (The Message)

This is how we live in the Spirit. In Christ we are given life. Paul goes on to say following on in Colossians 3:3-4 “Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your *real* life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. *He* is your life.” (The Message). We find our real life in Christ.

A friend of mine was asked to take on a very challenging role and found the decision difficult to make and struggled with making that decision. He wrote to me and said something like, “I cannot find anywhere in the Bible which says that we can put the Cross down.” He is right. So, he has taken on the new role because a significant group of people have discerned that he is the right person to do it.

When we don’t use bread that we have bought it goes stale or mouldy. When we don’t open ourselves up to being fed by Jesus, the outcome is that we can find ourselves feeling stale in our relationship with him, that is if we don’t feed on his words and allow them to speak into our lives, and if we don’t take seriously the place of prayer in our lives. We are left with a question. Do we want to live in the Spirit and in the Life which Jesus offers us? If your answer is yes today then take some time to chew on the Word of God – the word who is the Bread of Life and the word which feeds us and thereby informs us how to be alive in the Spirit.