

Bible study on John 6.35,41-51

Begin with an opening prayer

Lord God, you have the bread of life for the hungry and living water for the thirsty.

We come hungry and thirsty for your word, with a desire to know your will and to love with your unconditional love. Help us to be fed and to learn from you.

Amen.

Read the passage

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

Jesus comes out and speaks in public as plainly as he has ever done in this Gospel: he is the bread of life and coming to him will ensure that no one hungers or thirsts on the journey of following him in the world. But such plain speaking is also off-putting, and the crowd complain against him – just as their ancestors did in the desert. They claim to know who Jesus is. He is not the bread of heaven; he is Joseph's son, a boy whose mother and father they know – so he can't be anyone special.

How quick we are to judge people's value by where they come from or what they do. Of course, if the crowd really knew their history, they would know that it was full of people snatched from obscurity, from ordinary lives, and given life-changing and life-giving roles in the story of redemption (e.g. Moses, Elijah, David, Ruth – and a whole host of other Old Testament stars).

Now Jesus becomes mystical and eschatological: people can only relate to him if God draws them to him, and this is all leading up to the last day (the eschaton) when Jesus – not God – will raise those who have come to him as a result of the Father's grace (v.44). The Jewish people had come to believe that they would enjoy resurrection at the end of history and Jesus says that he is the key to that.

Then he says that if they knew their history, the history they keep reciting at him, they would know that the prophets had predicted all this, that God spoke to his people, and led them to himself (the quotation of Isaiah 54.13 in v.45). And Jesus is claiming that he is the fulfilment of all this, that those who believe in him enjoy the eschatological life he bestows on those drawn to him by his Father. He is the source of the life so many are searching for, and the people need to change their assumptions about God and about him.

Again he says, 'I am the bread of life.' But now he says that those who ate in the wilderness the first time died – partly because they all fell under God's judgement for their lack of belief and desire to worship something more manageable (i.e. the golden calf). But those who come to Jesus will never die. He has to say this twice, because what he is suggesting is so difficult for them to get their heads round.

How will this happen? They will be sustained for the journey by the bread that he gives, namely his flesh. Well, that's going to get a reaction, isn't it?

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

You are standing in the crowd, three rows back from Jesus, listening to both sides of the exchange (John 6) – what do you make of it all? You might have eaten well on the other side of the lake, but has it said anything to you about God and the way he acts in the world? Look at the role bread plays in this story and in the Bible more generally. Is there always a link between a square meal and spiritual nourishment? Is the provision of our physical needs an invitation from God to get to know the giver better? What clues are there in this story that help us to do that?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



- How have our assumptions about which professions are seen as 'heroes' changed in the past year?
- How should we deal with the assumptions we carry with us about other people?
- How might we break free from the assumptions others have about us?

Prayer

A prayer of thanksgiving

We thank and praise you, Lord God,
that despite our assumptions and judgements
and the way we sometimes treat others,
you never stop loving us.

Bread of life, you are always with us.

We praise you that as we draw near to you,
you quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger,
so that we never need hunger or thirst again.

Thank you that you equip us and resource us
with everything we need for this journey of life.

We thank and praise you, Lord God.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Thank you, Lord, for believing in us,
for seeing beyond our outside
and knowing who we really are inside.

Thank you for giving us all we need to do your work,
even when others may tell us we are 'only'.

Thank you, Lord, for calling us to be adverts for you,
so that others can see that you also believe in them.

Amen.