

**Ninth Sunday after Trinity 2015**

**John 6: 24 – 35**

My heart sank when I read this morning's reading from John 6. "I am the bread of life." I've just come back from the choir's concert tour in Germany: we've done nothing but eat bread. In under one week I've managed to put on 10 lbs! I think if I'd sat down on that mountain side with the 5000 and a lad had come forward with five loaves and two bratwurst sausages, I think I'd have said "I'll tell you what, Jesus, I think, actually, I'll just stay hungry."

Which is all a bit of a pity. Because the whole episode sets Jesus up for one of the best sound bites in the Bible – well, actually, for one of the 7 best sound bites in the Bible:

I am the good shepherd

I am the gate

I am the resurrection and the life

I am the way the truth and the life

I am the true vine

I am the light of the world

and . . . I am the bread of life.

The "I am" bit is just as important as the descriptor applied to it. "I am" is code for God. When Moses is confronted by God in the burning bush and Moses asks him who he is, God says "I am who I am." God is the great I am: he's too holy to have a name.

And throughout John's Gospel the identity of Jesus is gradually, slowly, teasingly being revealed. So when the first hearers of the gospel heard this portentous phrase being repeated their ears would prick up. And then they'd hear things which refer them back to what they already know about God: I am the good shepherd – who is the shepherd in Psalm 23? The Lord's my shepherd; Jehovah's my shepherd; the great I am is my shepherd; Jesus is the shepherd; Jesus is the great I am: the penny begins to drop; the identity of Jesus begins to be revealed.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

And these sound bites are fantastic stuff. Seven snappy, memorable phrases each of which encapsulates profound truths about the nature of the God we meet in Jesus. And that makes the Bible a brilliantly effective C21st tool of communication. Because we live in the age of the sound bite. The art of being a political speech writer today is the art of ensuring that within a 20 minute speech there is a phrase that takes about three seconds to say; that's short enough to be captured in the headlines of the TV news (or even put in a newspaper headline); and that sums up the message of the rest of the 20 minutes.

“I am the bread of life” – Tony Blair himself couldn't have put it better. We have a reading, 11 verses long, and we just plough through all the other words, simply hoping that it is all leading where we think it's leading; and then we get the relief of finding out in the eleventh verse that, yes, this really is the “I am the bread of life” reading. Which is all a bit of a pity. Because the other verses are really rather important, too.

Jesus makes it clear that he's not just a purveyor of spectacular floor shows – “I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” Seeing 5000 people fed with five loaves and two fishes is amazing, it's spectacular. It's worth turning up again: there might be something else equally thrilling. But Christian discipleship is about more than spectacle. It's about more than having an experience, which is fantastic in itself, but the memory of which gradually fades until we need to top it up again with another experience which equals or beats the last one; to lift us out of, hold us above reality.

The bread of life which Jesus gives us is the daily bread we pray for in the Lord's Prayer. I once made myself a promise that I wouldn't quote Greek when I was preaching, but I once heard a fascinating snippet about the Greek that we translate as “daily bread” in the Lord's Prayer. And that is that the word is unique. The Lord's Prayer is the only place it's found. So

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

although scholars think that “daily bread” is probably a good way to translate it, they can’t be sure because they can’t compare the way it’s used in the Lord’s Prayer with the way it’s used in other contexts. Or, at least, the word was unique until someone found a fragment of parchment in the late C19th century which contained the same Greek word. And it was a military document relating to the rations that Roman soldiers would collect each night and which were just enough for the next day’s subsistence. And then somebody lost the fragment!

But the point is that the daily bread that is Jesus is a subsistence allowance that sustains us within and engages us with daily life as it’s actually lived. It doesn’t remove us from it; it doesn’t lift us above it: it sustains us for it. Jesus underpins our existence. He assists us to endure and to navigate our way through austerity, the migrant crisis, asymmetric warfare, radicalisation of youth within the communities in which we live, technological change that undermines

the very assumptions upon which our culture and even our economic systems are based . . . Jesus is the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life even within all that. We shall not hunger; we shall not thirst. Our faith and our religious practices create within us the disposition, the character, the inclination to be able to draw on that support and sustenance. We don’t need to seek Jesus: we need the courage to trust that he’s with us.

Amen.