

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021**  
**Rev'd Wendy Wale**

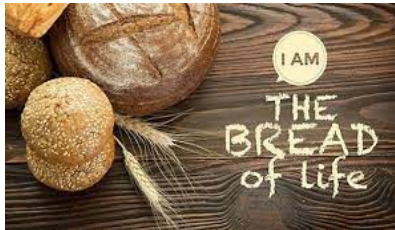
**John 6.24-35.**

<sup>24</sup>So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

<sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.'<sup>28</sup>Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'<sup>30</sup>So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?' <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."<sup>32</sup>Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'<sup>34</sup>They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'

<sup>35</sup> Jesus said 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.'

I am the bread of life....



How would you describe yourself? List achievements and roles....or put ourselves down- sometimes if we think a little differently, we can see different sides of ourselves, what we truly value, who we'd like to be...

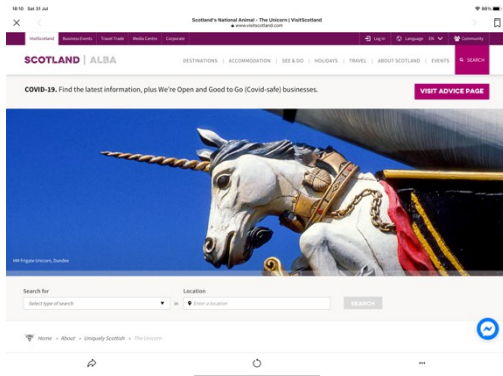
In interest of writing this talk, I asked my friends on Facebook what animal they would be, given all possibilities. The answers were fascinating and I could write a whole talk about them-but I'll resist and simply share a few reflections here now....

10 people would be a cat- largely due to the undisturbed sleep, the readily available food and comfort plus the ability to keep unwanted people at a distance- probably summed up by Trudi: a cat - i don't have to explain it to you just get out of my chair!

Several wanted to be eagles so they could soar above everything and enjoy the stunning views without fear of being attacked.



Others chose mystical or microscopic creatures for their eternal survival qualities: a tardigrade, unicorn, hydra or Pegasus ....



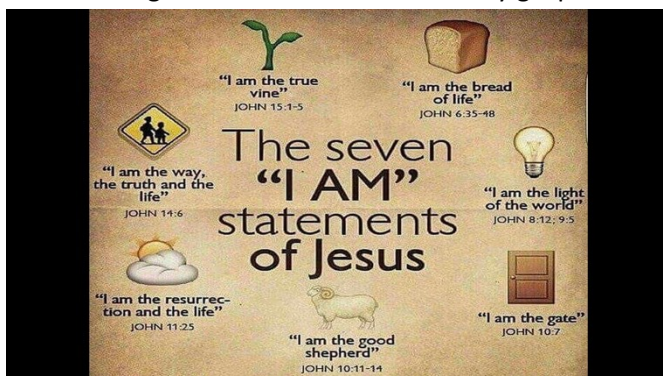
You may be wondering what this has to do with our reading this morning....or you may have worked out that when Jesus was describing himself to people, he very rarely gave straight answers, the only person he actually told directly he was the Messiah was the woman at the well.

Admittedly, he didn't describe himself as a dolphin or giraffe... Instead, he painted a series of pictures using every day images and ideas, that helped people grasp bit by bit who he was and what his purpose was.

(SLIDE)

Bread, light, a vine, a shepherd, the gate....images to help us grasp deeper truths about Jesus and ourselves, helping us understand what it means that he is the way, the truth and the life, the resurrection and the life....I AM.

This morning we hear the first of 4 Sunday gospel readings that focus on what it means that Jesus



says 'I am the bread of life'. It's the first of the 7 'I am' sayings and sets the scene for all the others.

The backdrop to today's passage is the feeding of the 5000. Jesus has provided 'food from heaven' for his hungry followers and they are delighted.

I can relate to this.

Tom and I went to Cornwall a few years ago and headed off on a reasonably long walk, not really taking into account the steepness of Cornish cliffs, slippery after rain, when imagining how long and hard the trek would be. We had to let Jonah off the lead so that he wouldn't pull us head first down the paths and I'll never forget his little face looking up from the bottom, as if to say- 'come on, what's taking you so long?'.



We had a goal in mind- a pub at the end of the journey- and we had a few snacks to keep us going along the way. However, by the time it got to mid-afternoon and we were still trudging up and down, getting hungrier and more thirsty by the minute.....the eventual appearance of the pub did, indeed, feel like something of a miracle!

Our apple and snack bar rations were now huge burgers and chips....almost large enough to feed the 5000....and we, like the crowd after the bread and fish miracle, were happy.

But, Jesus says...this isn't the point at all. What he wants us to understand about him isn't that he provides free food....it isn't even that he can heal people or set them free from torment. He is pointing to something so much bigger....

'...work for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you'-

This is still quite cryptic and so they ask....well, what should we do? What work shall we perform?

It's was like Tom and I trying to get to the pub....what can we do to get there quicker? Is there a bus? Is there a short cut?

Jesus replies...believe in the one whom God has sent (meaning himself)

At this point, there are lots of questions.....and they demand proof....what sign are you going to give us? What work will you perform?

But they are beginning to piece the story together as they recall...our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.....

Every Jewish person has the story of the Exodus deep in their soul. The story of Moses leading God's people out of slavery in Egypt into freedom in the promised land. A core part of the story is the provision of 'manna from heaven'- bread that appeared each morning, enabling the travellers to survive on their epic journey through the wilderness.



The crowd can see the connection between the provision of Manna (which is a kind of flat bread) and Jesus' provision of the loaves and fishes.....but they are still not sure what he is saying. They are still hoping for a providing, conquering hero (as we explored last week with James and his family, wanting to sit by Jesus' side in glory.) Will Jesus, like Moses, lead them into freedom from the oppressive Roman regime into a new promised land? Will he keep giving them free lunch?

Jesus nudges them a little further.....

'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'

This is the key moment, when Jesus takes the physical and explains the spiritual.

The crowd, still not fully understanding, recognise this is an important and powerful moment.... 'Sir, give us this bread always.'

**35** Jesus said 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.'

Jesus has taken the basic human condition of being hungry. The epic story of the Jewish people, of being fed and rescued. The powerful image of bread from heaven being the gift of God to the world... and then he declares that he IS all of these things.

He is God.

He is provider

He is liberator

He is the answer

Of course his followers don't fully understand- if we're honest, we still don't fully understand just how incredible the story of God and the person of God, made known in Jesus is....but still we are invited to eat the bread, to share the story, to encounter the person of Jesus, to live the mystery.

We all know hunger and thirst, we all have times when we struggle to see the big picture and make sense of what God is doing in our world or in our lives. There maybe times when we struggle to pray or make sense of who we are....

A couple of people struggled to answer my questions about being an animal, they replied, I want to be the best me as created and intended by God...and Me, as truly, deeply and honestly as I possibly can be.

My belief is that as we reach out for the bread, literally, symbolically, spiritually and our hearts cry, give us this bread.....that is all that is needed.

Jesus, the bread of life, will meet us just as we are, the best 'me' the worst 'me', the celebrating 'me' the crushed and broken 'me', the 'me' who is living truly, deeply and honestly and the 'me' who is hiding and afraid.

As we feed on him in our hearts, may we know we are loved, restored and swept into a story that is so much bigger than 'me', that restores 'me' to community, to not having to journey alone, to finding our place within the kingdom people- and reaching out to offer and receive bread with our fellow travellers..

