

# Beyond the Bread...

*... to God in Heaven.*

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*A sermon given on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity, 4th August – by the Curate, the Revd Charlie Shefford, in Beverley Minster.*

*John 6:24-35*

*"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

Imagine you and a friend go to an art museum, and rather than looking at the paintings, your friend spends the whole time looking at the little notices underneath the paintings with all the information, but never actually looks at the paintings themselves. You might feel they were slightly missing the point, and this is what is happening in today's gospel.

Our gospel story opens the day after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. The crowd who received the fish and loaves have decided to seek out Jesus again, not to become disciples, but because they want some more free food. When they find Jesus, he sees their true intentions immediately and tells them, *"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures through eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."* And this is the crux of the whole gospel story this morning. As is so often the case, Jesus is misunderstood by the crowd, and they end up talking past each other. Rather than the sign Jesus had just performed - the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 - leading them to faith and belief in him, it just leads them to want more bread. Jesus is talking about a spiritual reality - he is the true bread. But the crowd can only understand him in physical, material terms, an actual physical bread. This is reminiscent of Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus speaks to her of a spiritual water, the water which gushes up to eternal life. But she can only understand him in physical terms, saying, *'Sir, you have no buckets and the well is deep. Where do you get this living water?'* So the crowd continues to press Jesus for more physical bread. They say, *'Moses gave our ancestors manna in the wilderness. What are you going to do so that we might believe in you?'* Jesus tells the crowd, *'It was God, not Moses, who gave their ancestors manna in the wilderness.'* But even that was only physical bread, a temporary solution to a physical need. Now they can receive the true bread from heaven, which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

But like the Samaritan woman who thinks Jesus is talking about material water when he speaks of the living water and eagerly responds, *'Sir, give me this water'* - the crowd here responds to

his words about the true bread from heaven with an eager request that they may receive this bread forevermore. But they're still speaking and understanding him in merely physical terms, thinking he is talking about actual bread they can eat. So Jesus tries to make his meaning as plain as possible - *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."* Jesus is the bread. To eat the bread of life means to come to Jesus, to believe in him, to have total faith in him. The real significance of the feeding miracle that had just taken place was not in the physical satisfying of hunger, but as a sign of revelation - Jesus has demonstrated his divine power, revealed his divine identity through these miracles. And the miracles of Jesus should raise the eyes of those who witnessed them to heaven, the higher things. But instead, the crowd can only see the bread, only see things on this level. What Christ wants for us is to believe in him. He is the true bread. Eating this bread is having faith in him.

So we are called to a different kind of eating, which consists in trusting in him with our whole hearts and finding all our spiritual sustenance in him and his sacrifice for our sins. Likewise, in the Eucharist, we are reminded that our true sustenance is not purely physical, is not found in bread alone. We also need spiritual sustenance, the living bread. Often, like in today's gospel, we do not see that which is of God - we fail to discover, to see, or to hear these things of God. It is so easy to be blind to the things of God, to carry away from the moments of revelation, the externals, the bread which perishes, but to miss the treasure at the heart of revelation.

As we celebrate the Eucharist this morning, as we re-enact this gospel story, Jesus calls us to look at the signs of bread, but to allow our eyes to be carried up beyond the bread to God in heaven and to carry with us as we leave this church and go out into the world this same desire to look beyond the signs around us, to look for the divine revelation God is calling us to, both in our day-to-day lives and to the people around us.

## Reading Text

### 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.'