

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for Sunday 1st August

Gracious Father,
revive your Church in our day,
and make her holy, strong and faithful,
for your glory's sake
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 1st August

A reading from Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions."

A gospel reading from John 6:24-35

²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

²⁶ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

³⁰ So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



A reflection from Revd Priscilla Slusar

How much do we, as Christians, need to know and understand the Old Testament in order to make sense of the New? There are times when the Old Testament gives us a deeper insight into the life of Jesus and the texts of the New Testament. Today is one of those occasions.

In today's reading from St John's Gospel when Jesus talks about the bread that comes down from heaven, he is referring to that very well-known story of the people of Israel in the wilderness. Let's think about this so we can hear what Jesus is saying in the way that the original crowd heard him. Their understanding of God's relationship with his chosen people was at the core of their spirituality, of their very being.

In the book of Exodus we hear the story of the people of Israel as they leave the slavery of Egypt and search for the Promised Land. Imagine the scene It's about a month since they left Egypt and set off into the wilderness. They started off rejoicing; full of hope and promise – God's promise – that they would leave slavery behind for ever and enter into the Promised Land. They've pinned their hopes on Moses, together with his brother Aaron. God's chosen ones: these men will lead them.

But there's a problem - they've run out of food!

They left Egypt with only the unleavened dough of the Passover bread. But right now, they're hungry. And not just ordinary hungry, like skipping breakfast. They are so hungry that they pretty quickly lose sight of the Promised Land – their salvation. They even lose sight of God.

Not surprisingly, they're bad-tempered and they begin to blame Moses. They start to say that they'd rather be back in Egypt. They say they'd rather have died there among the 'fleshpots' with full bellies, than die of hunger in the wilderness.

Moses is quick to point out that their complaining is not really aimed at him and Aaron, but against God. But God hears their complaining, and, of course, he has a plan! He provides meat at twilight and bread, manna, every morning. As the dew lifts, the whole surface of the wilderness is covered in it. Moses reminds the people that it is God who has given them bread to eat.

But there's a catch! They must only gather what they need for that day. God is showing the people that he will provide for their needs each day. He's also testing their obedience: anything they try to keep for tomorrow will become unfit to eat. It is still 'bread for today', not bread that will last.

So... this provides the background to today's Gospel reading.

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



Jesus is in Capernaum, near to the time of the Passover, the celebration of the Jews fleeing from slavery in Egypt. The crowd that comes looking for Jesus in Capernaum are the very same people who've just taken part in the miracle picnic on the grassy hillside, on the other side of the lake, that we heard about last Sunday.

Are they looking for evidence of another miracle, another 'sign'? Are they hoping for more food – many of them would have been poor people who found it difficult to feed themselves and their families. Are they following him in the hopes of witnessing healing miracles? Are they curious about him, trying to find out who he is, why he is so special? They've already declared him Prophet, and wanted to make him King. But now they're calling him Rabbi, Teacher. They know, of course, that something quite extraordinary has happened and they suspect that there's more to come!

Jesus' first response may seem a little odd.

"Do not look for the food that perishes..." he says, "but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. It is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

There are clues in John's Gospel about God's seal on Jesus that we, the readers, can spot. For example, at his baptism John the Baptist testifies that he has seen the Spirit descend from heaven and remain on Jesus.

But the crowd who have followed Jesus do not seem to understand and are still not satisfied. They want to know what they must do to perform the works of God and they want to know what work Jesus is performing? They are still not quite ready to believe that *Jesus* is the work of God. They are still looking for signs; they need convincing.

'What about the manna that our ancestors ate in the wilderness?', they ask. They're still thinking about food, you see! It seems that they, like their ancestors, may still have their sights set on Moses. That's understandable: Moses is rightly revered as a great leader, who led the people out of slavery and into freedom. But Jesus is as quick as Moses was before him to remind them that: "it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven...but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven".

This true bread is bread that will not perish. It is the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Not just for today, to satisfy our immediate hunger. And not just for one group of people, captured in one story, set in time. But for all people, for all time.

Maybe that crowd in Capernaum finally begin to understand when they ask Jesus: "Sir, give us this bread always". And Jesus says: "I am the bread of life". The one sent by God to give life to the world - life that is eternal. Life that is rooted in our relationship with Jesus.

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



If we can focus on Jesus and feed on the spiritual bread that he offers to us then we will create the kingdom of God here on earth. We will be open to the message of God's love for all people, and we will be on the road to salvation and hope for the future.

Let us pray with the people who are following Him:

"Lord, give us this bread always." Amen