

SME John 6: 24-35

What must we do to perform the works of God? Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him who he has sent'.

Jesus confronts the crowd that question him. He calls out their fickle nature. Saying you are here because you have had your fill of bread. But he wants the people to know that he has so much more to offer. He speaks of himself in the third person in fact as a metaphor. I am the bread of life. I wonder why he used this language. Perhaps he was appealing to simplicity. We need and desire food and he says; I am the one that sustains and more than that, the one that brings eternal life.

The theme of lack of understanding is a feature of John's gospel as it is of Mark. Rowan Williams says we should not be down on the disciples for their incapacity to grasp the meaning of Jesus' words. Williams says that is because what Jesus brought into the world has no precedent. How can we expect that that the truth and the reality of Jesus should be grasped?

Jesus' words indicate that man finds his true being not in what he himself achieves, **but in submission to what God works**; he finds it that is to say, in what, by faith, he allows to happen to himself.

The crowd recognizes the radical nature of Jesus' invitation and demands assurance that he has authority to advocate a sweeping departure from their traditional religious practice. They are focused on Mosaic law to assure their salvation. Now thirty something uncredentialed product suggests they abandon their long-held allegiance.

People demand a sign. We probably suffer from the same spiritual myopia and limitation. We also may find ourselves seeking signs and assurances. The bread of heaven is a paradox. If we want something

from Jesus, we have to receive him. If we approach with the desire for the gift of life we have to learn that Jesus himself is the gift that we really want. Jesus gives the bread of life he is the bread of life.

Why do we seek after the food that perishes? Rather than the food that endures are we unwilling or unable to name what we truly hunger for? Perhaps we fear disappointment? Or perhaps and clarity we fear that we are undeserving?

To hear Jesus' words is to hear the invitation to trust that God is doing something new.

Such faith does mean separating out the spiritual and the social. It means putting God rather than us at the centre of both. When we do, we can and will expect more. How do we go about putting God at the centre?

The challenge of this gospel and experience this week brought me to thinking about Sam Well's book that Parish Council has been considering over a period of months. I have been asking myself what it is about Well's approach that excites and intrigues. He provides incredible theorising about both past and future. He has one firm conviction. Put God at the centre and all will be well. His proposition is that the church has a future that is bigger than its past.

While thinking about Well's contention parish council had a Zoom visit from our area dean Tim. He shared with us graphs that indicate 4 ways we might respond to the crisis that the church has experienced during Covid closure. The first is recovery to what we were, reframing new opportunity based on new experience, next closure release recovery is not possible. If we are to look at any of the proposed responses with ourselves at the centre of the picture we humans become the measure of what can be achieved. It seems to me that this is today's gospel speaks into the current situation of our faith and today's church.

When Jesus speaks in metaphor I am the bread of life he tells us the food that lasts. Why is it that we look past this truth? Is it because we can get lost in language when we need an experience in the here and now to bring home the reality? I need this task broken down into bite sized chunks. I need steps. Last week I suggested Dorff's model of letting go, letting be and letting grow.

I'll concentrate on some of what Wells shares about where we meet God who is the eternal food. It happens often when people come face to face with the living God in Jesus. In today's story the crowd is sceptical and bemused. The disciples have travelled across the lake in a boat, the crowd has walked around the lake and Jesus has clearly arrived clearly by miraculous means. He has walked on water. He has just fed 5,000. His explanation has the scope to transform those whom he meets.

Often it is times when people have exhausted their own powers Jesus' powers transform. Think of Jairus' daughter lies dying. Think of the woman who has been caught in adultery and the crowd is ready to stone her. In such stories we see that people begin to trust that God is with them. We need this knowledge.

Wells states that with God, the future is always bigger than the past. We are challenged to remember God is with us.

Wells suggests that if we really want to understand that we are close to God we have to review our own experience. He reports on a group offering ministry to the bereaved by visiting. He said that this group became the most dynamic and energised group in a congregation because each member was finding truth, courage and divine encounter. Would you like to be on such a journey?

This is a real issue a live issue! If we want to hear Jesus' invitation to the bread that brings eternal life we have to **do something**. We need to pray, participate in the Eucharist and perhaps seek spiritual

guidance. I need to do that because I can only lead others as far as I have travelled on the spiritual journey.

Wells tells us that we must always remain humble. Our first requirement is for self-examination. We have to look for ways to put ourselves in the presence of God. He suggests developing self-control, balance and repairing relationships.

Wells has to say about becoming a blessing it is not so much a series of activities and techniques but it is more **a state of mind**. Is that not exactly what Jesus talking about when he says I am the bread of life”.

Reference

Wells, S. *A Future That Is Bigger Than The Past* Catalysing Kingdom Communities Canterbury Press 2019 Norfolk UK.

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