

“Being Fed”
(John 6.35, 41-51)

Grant Bullen

Introduction

*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.” (35)*

This statement of Christian faith is clear... unequivocal. Christ Jesus is the one who satisfies our hunger.

And that’s where this sermon will end... but let’s begin at the beginning.

What is this hunger that we feel within?

(Or putting it another way)... if Jesus is the answer, what is the question?

If Jesus is the remedy, what is the illness?

Our Hunger

We’re hungry people... a hungry culture... an emptiness evocatively captured in the 1960’s Rolling Stones classic, ‘*Satisfaction*’ – as in, “*I can’t get no... I try and I try and I try, but I can’t get no... satisfaction.*’ It’s an anthem for hungry, unsatisfied people.

The great consumerist recipe for happiness – money, possessions, holidays, houses, status, power – hasn’t worked. It doesn’t work.

No matter how hard we try, there’s always something missing... we can never get enough. Clearly consumerism has failed... and yet it remains remarkably resilient, because when challenged, it simply replies, ‘*But you just need more of it. You just need to try harder.*’ And as a society, as people, we do... We keep going back to the same dry well, and we try and try and try... But we’re still so hungry... so un-satisfied.

I laugh happily at myself – the impotence of a ‘little’ Sunday-morning preacher, railing against the impossibly seductive power and impregnability of western consumerism – very much a futile and comical spitting into the wind.

And yet, maybe there’s a brief reflective moment, where we can hear a voice within say, ‘*But it’s not working for me.*’

And in this brief moment of reality, can I offer this humble suggestion...

We’re looking in the wrong place... because, we don’t understand what the nature of our hunger truly is...

Augustine and Restlessness

You’ll know of the great figure of early Christianity, 4th-5th century bishop theologian, Augustine of Hippo. He’s had a somewhat negative reputation in the liberal-minded church of our time, largely because of his teaching on original sin... But that’s not a fair representation of his legacy... However, you may have heard this quotation...

*“You have made us for yourself Lord
and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”*

This is Augustine’s diagnosis of the root our unsatisfied hunger.

We are hungry for God!

Our hunger flows from our true identity... people created *by* God for the purpose of relationship *with* God. This is one of the fundamentals of contemplative awareness – we are created *IN* love... *FROM* love... *FOR* love.

So, we are hungry, restless, lost without meaning or purpose... because we live our lives in the illusion of perceived separateness... at a distance from God.

In this illusion of individualism, we experience disconnection from our Source... from the One who is our great and true Love... from God who is not only our Creator but our ‘home’... our destiny.

And... disconnection from our very selves... for we are blind to, ignorant of, who we truly are, and that which is our true purpose and meaning.

We are hungry for GOD.

And nothing – no matter how spectacular, exotic or stimulating – can ever satisfy us, but GOD.

Only GOD can feed us.

Christ Jesus as the Bread of Life

So, in John's Gospel, we hear Christ Jesus say...

"I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry..."

Theologically, we can say that Christ Jesus is the *sacrament of the presence of God*.

Jesus is the '*outward and visible sign*'... immediate and accessible... that awakens us to the real experience of GOD... the presence of GOD.

It's another way of speaking about the Incarnation – that we meet the invisible God (who is unfathomable mystery) in the humanity, the flesh of Christ Jesus...

For this is God's desire and will – that we be one.

And so, in opening ourselves to relationship with Christ Jesus, in entrusting ourselves to him and his way, in *feeding* on him, we are fed by GOD...

We are fed by God... and satisfied.

Theology and Experience

This is our faith.

Theology is important... *and* I find it helpful.

But I always get to this place, where the question is...

*'Yes, but what is the **experience** of this? In my experience of life, how does God feed me, satisfy me?'*

Jesus is the Bread of **Life!** So, where is this happening in *my life*... and how is it enriching my experience of living?

This is a constant dilemma, particularly in preaching...

I'm writing away, happily enough, and I get to this point...

Firstly, do I actually know what I'm talking about here? Is this real in my life... or just words?

And secondly, can I describe the little that I know... can I speak of it in terms of life.

It's a dilemma.

All I can do is be honest in saying... I only know a *little*... I am a beginner in the deeper journey.

All I can do, is share the little I have. (I'm the boy with 5 barley loaves and a couple of fish.)

And the only way I know to speak of such things, is to tell a story... reflecting on how it is for me... hoping that it may stir some connection with your life story... because that's where the hidden treasure lies.

(Anyway... for what it's worth... Here's a story.)

The Story

Twenty years ago, I ended a week of silent retreat with the resolution... that I had to establish a 'daily rendezvous'¹ with GOD... a disciplined spiritual practice... because my occasional episodic connections could take me no further.

Now, I'd made the same resolution many times before... and so my ears rang with mocking voices laughing at me... "*You'll never do it! You're a fraud. You're hopeless.*"

But somehow, I set the alarm for early the next morning, and I did get up and have a go... and then the next morning... and then the next. And in the mystery of grace, two decades later I'm still going.

Now it's important to realise, I had no idea what I was doing...

I had no spiritual practice, no training, no pattern of prayer... and I look back with a gentle embarrassment at the ineptness of those early days. I was hopeless!

But here's the thing...

It didn't matter.

GOD was waiting for me.

It was like walking into a restaurant for a date... knowing you're terribly late... knowing you're dressed inadequately, and you have no idea what to say or do.

But there's your date... waiting for you... beaming at you across the room... eyes full of delight and love.

¹ As Jim Finley calls it.

And you realise, She/He has always been there... waiting for you.

And there, spread on the table, is a meal... a banquet of profligate abundance.

Day by day, GOD feeds me.

(Yes, but what's that like?)

There are many things I'd like to try to describe... for there are many dishes on the table – (so it's merciful that this sermon is coming to its proper end).

I'd like to talk about the flow of *insight*... of *new awareness/consciousness*... of *invitation*.

I'd like to talk about connecting to life, to other people and myself in a way I'd previously only dreamed of.

I'd like to talk about the experience of *feeling grounded*... of *home* – but then I'd need to say that there are just as many times of *struggle, painful recognition of failure, repentance*... *feeling lost*.

There has indeed been some *healing of past wounds*... but also the *fear of being drawn into a new world and leaving the old securities behind*.

This meal is *challenging*... sometimes it feels like *dying*...

And there's much more, for the table is full... and as the meal continues, more and more dishes arrive...

But slowly it emerges... it dawns on me.

GOD is feeding me with His/Her very self.

The meal is GOD.

It's presence I guess... It's certainly *love*...

Do I understand this... can I describe this?

No, not really! That's as far as I can go.

But perhaps it offers a window into today's Gospel...

Conclusion

Jesus says,

"The bread I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (51)

Slightly paraphrased by Eugene Peterson...

"The Bread that I present to the world, so that it can eat and live is myself..."