John 6:35, 41-51, 66-69. Jane Ward-Hall

I Am the Bread of Life pt 2

Jesus declared “I am the bread of life”. Dolapo spoke on this subject last Sunday and one of the points she made is that if we follow Jesus primarily for the blessings He gives rather than seeking Jesus for Himself we can be vulnerable to feeling that our faith has failed us when things go wrong. It’s such an easy trap to fall into. Don’t we say in the Lord’s Prayer “ Give us this day our daily bread”. The thing is Jesus doesn’t just give us bread to eat. He is the bread. Jesus himself is the food that sustains our life in and through our every breath and heartbeat.

Early in my Christian life Moya took me under her wing, answered my questions and faithfully prayed for me. There was a lot I didn’t understand and one comment she made, around that time, was “We need to be careful what we feed ourselves on.” I was perplexed!

I realised she didn’t mean it was important I ate plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and cut down on wine and chocolate! But as far as my fledgling faith was concerned I had no idea what she meant. It was years later reading today’s scripture that the penny finally dropped.

Everything we do, think about, listen to, watch, read, feeds us. We are constantly feeding ourselves mentally and emotionally irrespective of physically. We think about 60,000 thoughts a day. What is the focus of them? Are we feeding our fears and anxieties or are we feeding our faith?

We have so much choice these days. God’s unconditional love for us means He wants us to be free to choose Him. God wont force us to believe in him. It’s up to us. In our reading the Jews are affronted by Jesus’ words. “How can he say he’s the bread of life, come from heaven, we know where he’s from, he’s Joseph’s son”. They had created an image of what they thought The Messiah would be like and when they saw flesh and blood Jesus, who had a family, this just didn’t fit in with their preconceived notions. Despite the miracles they saw, they chose not to believe Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Jesus said “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”(v51).

This references the cross and the Eucharist when we “eat” the body of Christ broken for us.

After hearing His words many disciples desert Jesus. This time the crowd isn’t growing it’s reducing by the minute. Were they hoping for more free suppers rather than challenging teaching? Eventually just the 12 are left. Jesus asks “Are you leaving too?”.

Peter speaks up “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God”(v68-69).

What can we notice in these words? Peter in effect says “we’re not staying with you just because we’ve seen the lame walk and the lepers healed, frankly Lord there are times you act in unexpected ways that don’t feel comfortable but overall you offer us hope, more hope than we ever dreamed of. That’s why we stay. Your words give us hope of eternal life. And as a result of this we have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Peter says come to “believe” and to “ know”. Believing comes before knowing. Choice again! By choosing to believe it somehow opens the door to us seeing and experiencing more of God. Starting to understand things which logically make no sense. Stuff beyond logic like the creator of the universe cares for me personally.

Do you ever think back as to how you first came to believe in Jesus? He is always knocking at the door of our hearts inviting us to know Him. There are so many ways that Jesus draws us to Himself. It’s always personal. Often answering a need, or awakening us to see differently.

For me it was when I realised that a good God was in charge so I didn’t have to be! I felt a great sense of relief! It was much later that I came to know that Jesus died for me on the cross and would have done if I had been the only person living. This pattern of believing and knowing continues throughout our lives.

I find the teachings of St Ignatius a great help in my spiritual direction work.

A tenet of Ignatian spirituality is “Finding God in all things”. God can be seen and found everywhere.

Thomas Keating said “The chief thing that separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from Him. If we get rid of that thought, our troubles will be greatly reduced”.

Jesus tells us “He is the living bread that came down from heaven.” By declaring He is our bread, something as physical, finite and mundane as bread, it seems to me Jesus is confirming that Ignatius got it right. If God can be found in all things then when Jesus says He’ll never leave us or forsake us He really means it! The hardest task for us is to really trust and believe His words. But changing our diet, from tv and social media to the Bible, choosing to feed more on Jesus, give our attention to Him, will enable our faith to be strengthened. I assure you we won’t regret it!

The breadth of today’s gospel reading is truly amazing. Going from the everyday to the everlasting, the finite to the infinite. This is who Jesus is and when we become followers of Jesus a great exchange takes place so that what is true of Jesus is true of us! We are finite now but we have an infinite future. What a mystery! Not a mystery that we can never grasp but a mystery that we can endlessly ponder.

Amen.