

Sunday 26th July 2009 Christ Church 9.00 am

I am the bread of life – John 6:25-69

Let us pray

God our father we thank you for your word. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that through Jesus we can have eternal life. We ask this morning that you will be at work in each one of us, as we remember what Jesus has said, and how that should affect our lives today and in the week ahead. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

This morning, we begin a new series of sermons on “The ‘I Am’ Sayings” of Jesus. There are seven occasions in the Gospels when Jesus said, “I am” and then gave some kind of insight into the person Jesus, the work he had been sent to do and they give us the best ways of understanding how Jesus was God’s answer to our need.

The seven sayings of Jesus are:

I am the bread of life
I am the light of the world
I am the gate
I am the resurrection and the life
I am the way, the truth, and the life
I am the true vine
and I am the good shepherd.

Over the next seven weeks we will consider each of these sayings looking at how they tell us something about Jesus and what that means for us living and working here in Moreton.

The first of the “I am” sayings, we heard in our reading is when Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”

As I was preparing this sermon, I was thinking about my own “I am” statements and how someone might describe me if they had the time to follow me around for a week or so. Well it may not come as a surprise to you, but I first focussed on all my negative traits, and my annoying habits:

So I am an untidy person.
And I am a forgetful person.

My desk in work is paper chaos. It is totally disorganised. People give me things to work on and within an hour or two they are buried under even more paper and forgotten about. At home I am exactly the same. My in tray is very full with a jumble of church things to do, things to read, and there’s probably the odd bill in there to pay as well.

In contrast to Jesus, wherever I go I seem to create a mess, and, coupled with my untidiness is my capability to forget things. I seem to leave my possessions all over the country. As far as I can remember there should be a coat of mine somewhere in North Devon, there may still be a book in the lost property of British Rail and let’s not even start to ponder where all my socks have gone.

In work, Dave sits at the next desk to me and he is the complete opposite of me. His desk is completely organised and you can actually see the colour of his desk! I know that my piles of papers frustrate Dave and he cannot understand how I can work efficiently in my state of chaos. Even though I may be untidy and forgetful, are these things important to Jesus? As we start to look at the “I am” sayings of Jesus we will start to see and to remind ourselves about the things that are important to Jesus and the way he explains what our true priorities for life should be.

In my world of paper chaos I am thankful that Jesus does not mention having a good memory, nor does he insist on me being tidy, rather, I think Jesus knows we are not perfect, but as we heard about this morning, Jesus gives us everything we need to one day live that perfect eternal life.

So let us pick up the story so far that leads up to our reading this morning. What has Jesus been doing before his first declaration that he is the bread of life? Jesus has just taken a small quantity of food and has multiplied it feeding well over 5000 people gathered to hear him – I guess most of us know the story very well, but instead of seeing the miracle as standalone proof that Jesus seemed to have the power of God, we rarely go on to read what follows and see the significance of Jesus’ words “I am the bread of life”.

The crowd, quite rightly, has huge expectations of Jesus, after all, they have just witnessed an incredible miracle. The Jews in the crowd will have been well aware of what happened to God’s chosen people when they were in the wilderness, as we heard in our first reading, in Exodus 16. When they were in the desert God had provided Manna – a bread like substance each day for 40 years. In the same way God had provided for his people in the past, this crowd are now expecting Jesus to provide them with a real sign and we can hear them saying – “We know what Moses did for us, so what are you, Jesus, going to do for us?”

In verse 35 we see Jesus replying to their request for a sign. “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Notice here how Jesus makes it quite clear that to satisfy hunger and thirst people need to come to Jesus and believe in Jesus. This falls well short of the expectations of the people here and I guess it is all too easy for us to fall into that same trap. At the very end of chapter 6 we see that so hard was this message for the crowd that many followers left. At the start of chapter 6 Jesus starts with a crowd of well over 5000 and as soon as Jesus says that he is the bread of life the crowds disappear to such an extent that if we follow on to verse 67 we read “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the twelve.

By our human standards such a fall in popularity would be declared a complete failure. Even the disciples of Jesus did not understand the complete picture. If we look at our own lives there will always be parts we want to improve. Our modern way of life is cluttered with statistics and bureaucratic jargon and ways of improving our efficiency, our earnings, and our future. But in trying to improve, we are falling into the same trap that led thousands of people to give up on Jesus.

Let us look at why Jesus declaring he is the bread of life results in such a huge decline in popularity?

Well I think it is all to do with people misunderstanding the signs and the miracles that Jesus performed and misunderstanding Jesus himself. So it is very good news for us that we have all these "I am" sayings, so we can learn exactly who Jesus was.

Maybe you've already sorted out for yourself what Jesus being the bread of life means for you, but when we step out into the world there are plenty of people who have still not found Jesus. And there are probably just as many Christians who want Jesus to be something he is not. Indeed God's agenda for our lives very often takes us by surprise and just like the followers here in John's Gospel, want Jesus to be something he is not. So often we rebel against the will of God in our lives, I have only to look at my own life over the past 18 months to see my expectations being totally misaligned with God's plan.

Stepping out in faith to start to lead services here in church, starting to preach have all coincided with probably the toughest episodes of my life so far, the death of my father and extreme work pressure due to the credit crunch and most recently, a number of redundancies.

So how about your expectations of Jesus? If Jesus is your bread of life, how are you working out God's plan for your life?

We have seen over 5000 followers drift away because Jesus turned out to be nothing like the political King they wanted. When the message was hard, when life was not going to be easy, the majority chose not to follow Jesus.

If we allow Jesus to be our bread of life, God himself, through Jesus becomes our bread and our truth. As we read Jesus saying, we need to come to him and we need to believe in him, so that nothing in this life can spoil our future eternal life that Jesus promises here. No matter how hard our lives are, or become, feeding on Jesus is something we need to do daily.

Now that is not to say we need to have a communion service every day, certainly not. The life of Jesus has not yet been given up as a sacrifice for our sins, which is what we remember during communion - Jesus body being broken for us. Notice here how Jesus uses the word "flesh" not body. What is the significance of flesh rather than body? Let us just look again at verses 38 and 40, Jesus is talking about him doing his father's will. Jesus is quite clear where he comes from and what God wants him to do. Jesus is God amongst us.

In verse 51 Jesus now tells the crowd that he is the living bread, that, came down from heaven, and that my *flesh* is for the life of the world. Whereas previously the manna from heaven was just for God's chosen people, here the flesh of Jesus is for the whole world. Instead of sending manna from heaven, God has chosen to send Jesus in human form, in human flesh, to be the bread we need to depend upon each day.

And that is one of the biggest challenges we face in our lives today. It is so easy to live our lives not depending upon Jesus. We all have the ability to enjoy life, enjoy our friends and family, to enjoy our possessions, to even have so much that we can

carry on despite losing things along the way. But to actually depend on Jesus every day, to pray give us today our daily bread, to continually recognise Jesus as being the only way to an eternal life without all the rubbish that clutters our human existence, has to be the true faith of a Christian.

The words of Jesus saying "I am the bread of life" are a clear message that God sent Jesus to rescue us. We all need rescuing. It is not the kind of rescue my desk in work needs, far from it, I need, we all need, an eternal everlasting rescue, and Jesus does this with a love that is not seen in humans. Have you felt the love of Jesus? Are you living your life depending on a Jesus that loves you more than anyone else can love you?

If we recognise we are all in need of Jesus, are we ready to commit ourselves to everything he is? Verse 66 says that from this moment many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Jesus. What does Jesus do next? Plead with them to come back? Soften his message to make it more popular? No, he turns on the few that remain and asks "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Then Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

This morning we need to ask ourselves, do I believe in all that Jesus is?

Let us pray. Heavenly father, we pray that you will be at work in each one of us, that you will strengthen our faith in Jesus. That we will see Jesus as our daily bread. That by your holy spirit we will lose the things in our lives that do not include Jesus and that in every part of our lives we will depend upon you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.