

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : August 1st, 2021
“9th Sunday After Trinity ”

TRINITY 9 2021

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD. Most, if not all of us of course, love our food. We know we are so very fortunate to live in a country that gives us so much choice – probably too much choice if truth were told! Everyone knows that our bodies need food every day for us to stay healthy and for us to grow. We run on food like a car runs on petrol.

Last Sunday here at Christ Church we celebrated St James – though if we had not done so, we would have heard the story of Jesus feeding the hungry crowds – 5000 of them – with a few loaves, blessed, broken and shared so that they enjoyed a good meal – and with enough crumbs left over to fill 12 baskets. Today and next Sunday Jesus goes on to draw an image from that event when he proclaims: ‘I am the Bread of Life’ – in other words, *I am the Jesus who is the Bread of life who satisfies your hunger and sustains you on your journey to heaven.*

A loaf of bread – the most basic of foodstuffs. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and the name of that place, in Aramaic, means ‘the town of bread’. So, Jesus was born in a place where bread was baked and shared. And of course, Christians down the centuries have prayed ‘Give us this day our daily bread’. By a neat co-incidence today, 1 August, is also known as Lammas Day – or Loaf Mass Day, the day in the Book of Common Prayer calendar when a loaf baked with flour from newly harvested corn would be brought into church and blessed. It's one of the oldest

points of contact between the agricultural world and the Church. The others were Plough Sunday in early January. This is the Sunday after Epiphany and the day before work would begin again in the fields after Christmas festivities, when ploughs would be brought to church to be blessed. Then there are the Rogation days in May, the days before Ascension Day, when God's blessing would be sought on the growing crops. As an aside, Lammas Day is also one of the cross-quarter days. The cross-quarter days are four holidays falling in between the quarter days: Candlemas (2 February), May Day (1 May), Lammas (1 August), and All Saints Day (1 November).

So here is a loaf of bread which I will bless in a moment, representing everything good that God gives us. Bread is of course fundamental to our Communion Service as it has been since that first Maundy Thursday when Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it – so that his disciples – both then and now - would remember him. Lately we have not been able to share the common cup but the Church has been at pains to stress that receiving the bread is to be regarded as complete Communion. In technical terms the sacrament of the Eucharist is received in totality even when receiving it in just one form, the bread.

The sharing of the bread in the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 was probably the closest to Communion that Jesus shared with the people in those early days of his ministry. But we mustn't forget the crumbs.

Dean Andrew Nunn of Southwark Cathedral tells this story: *My auntie always reminds me about when I was a little boy that I would tell the same joke over and over again. 'Two biscuits were crossing the road. One got run over; the other shouted' 'Crumbs!' She said I laughed every time and that really amused them, even if the joke didn't.*

Jesus was so keen that nothing be lost. In the account in St John's Gospel of the feeding of the multitude we read: *When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.'* So they gathered

them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. (John 6.12-13)

The fragments, the crumbs were so important – ‘that nothing may be lost’. We care and pray for all who join together in worship week by week – and especially to those who come nervously and gently as a seeker, a doubter, a questioner. God reassures that all are welcome. For Jesus says to them and to us: *‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’*

BLESSING OF THE BREAD

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the people of God in ancient times presented to the Lord an offering of first-fruits as a sign of their dependence upon God for their daily bread. On this Lammas Day, we bring a newly baked loaf from newly harvested wheat, baked in thanksgiving to God for his faithfulness.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation; you bring forth bread from the fields and give us the fruits of the earth in their seasons. Accept this loaf, which we bring before you, made from the harvest of your goodness. Let it be for us a sign of your fatherly care. Blessed are you, Lord our God, worthy of our thanksgiving and praise. Blessed be God for ever.

And a final prayer: Lord God, bless our work, our gathering, that nothing may be lost.

Amen.