

## **Address for 1 August 2021 by Bill Pattinson**

### **“I am the bread of life” Trinity 9**

*“Where to get bread? An ever-pressing question  
That trembles on the lips of anxious mothers,  
Bread for their families, bread for all these others;  
A whole world on the margin of exhaustion.  
And where that hunger has been satisfied  
Where to get bread? The question still returns  
In our abundance something starves and yearns  
We crave fulfilment, crave and are denied.”*

Malcolm Guite, the poet priest, has been very generous in posting early his sonnet “I am the bread of life”, which is due to appear in his poetry book “Parable and Paradox” to be published next year. This book includes a sequence of all seven “I am” statements in John’s gospel, of which this is the first. He posted it early on his website for all those preaching this Sunday. Thank you, Malcolm.

“Where to get bread” and “What sort of bread to get” are the two important questions posed by this morning’s readings. Anxious mothers are found all over the world seeking food for their children - world poverty is just one of those “ever-pressing questions.” The rise and great use of food banks provides evidence of poverty in our own country. “Where to get bread?” With the “whole world on the margin of exhaustion” due to the pandemic, “where to get bread” has become even more desperate for many. Even those who have bread in abundance, Guite suggests, are hungry, starving and craving for fulfilment, not of their physical needs, but of their spiritual needs.

What sort of bread to get? Well, I like many different breads - perhaps granary is my favourite. What’s yours? The crowd, looking for Jesus in our Gospel Reading, were seeking “free bread”. They had gone out of their way to find Jesus, taking to their boats to get to the other side of Lake Galilee. They’d already had one excellent free meal of bread and fish and were hoping for another, just as their forefathers were fed

by manna and quails in the wilderness. I mean who says “No” to a free meal? Jesus rebukes them. “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” Jesus then talks of true bread from Heaven, the bread of God, the bread of life. He was asking them to believe in him as the bread of life. “I am the bread of life. Whoever believes in me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” This is an entirely different sort of bread to which many of Jesus’ followers are seeking. They can no longer trust this wandering prophet. This was a turning point where many of his disciples left him. “Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him,” John reports later in the chapter.

Who can we trust? What can we trust? Trust appears such a difficult thing to find in a world of so many “ever pressing questions.” Can we trust a government that decreases overseas aid, which appears unsympathetic to refugees and immigrants? Can we trust what we read in our newspapers and on social media? Can we trust world governments to make the necessary reductions in carbon emissions to overcome climate warming? Can we trust for our own safety as we walk our streets at night? Can we trust and find God in these demanding times? We want to know what to do and hope God will make it clearer. There are so many voices to listen to, how do we know which one is God’s? We are surrounded by fake news, scam telephone calls and emails, it’s no wonder our sense of trust and belief in truth has been shaken and undermined.

I have found great hope in the recent work and energy of two of our young footballers, Marcus Rashford and Raheem Sterling. They will have influenced so many, especially the young people and are excellent role models - Marcus because of his tireless and remarkably successful campaign for the under privileged in our society and Raheem for his full support to the campaign “Kick it out” and other racial equality organisations. It’s also good to hear that they have both been influenced in what they do by their Christian faith, although you don’t hear a great deal about that in the media.

The Israelites in our first reading are on a journey of trust. Through Moses, God has saved them from the slavery in Egypt, now they face starvation. God feeds them with manna, satisfying their physical needs, but can they believe in the spiritual food he provides? Likewise the crowd following Jesus are on a journey of trust. They’ve been

fed bread and fish to satisfy the body, can they trust the new manna, the new bread which God has given them through his Son, Jesus, to satisfy their inner being, their spirit, their soul? We are also on a journey of trust. When we take and eat the body of Christ, which Belinda is soon to offer us, do we trust in him to feed us anew with the promise of a precious relationship, with the promise of eternal life?

When we believe and trust in Jesus, eating, ingesting and taking him into our lives we change, we live differently, we are transformed. We see ourselves and one another as persons created in the image and likeness of God rather than as obstacles or issues to overcome. We choose the bread of love and forgiveness rather than that of anger or retribution; the bread of intimacy and vulnerability rather than that of superficiality and defensiveness; we eat the bread of God rather than our own bread of selfishness and self-satisfaction.

You may know the amazing story of Sara Miles which she tells in her own book “take this bread; A radical conversion”. She started a food pantry in America and was to give away tons of fruit, vegetables and cereals. The preface to her book begins:

“One early, cloudy morning when I was forty-six, I walked into a church, ate a piece of bread, took a sip of wine. This was my first communion. It changed everything.”

It’s a good read. Food for the soul.

Where to get bread? What sort of bread to get? Malcolm Guite’s last six lines to his sonnet read”

“And then comes One who speaks into our needs  
Who opens out the secret hopes we cherish  
Whose presence calls our hidden hearts to flourish  
Whose words unfold in us like living seeds  
Come to me, broken, hungry, incomplete,  
I Am the Bread of Life, break Me and eat.”