**“How Can this man give us his flesh to eat?”**

**Proverbs 9:1-6. John 6: 51-58. Sermon by Sarah Maybury 15.8.21**

Let us pray:

*Father God, strengthen our faith in Jesus, guide us in our listening and understanding of Your* ***Living*** *Word. Thank you for the gift of Your Son, Jesus –* ***the bread of life****, help us and draw us by Your Spirit as we believe in Him, abide in Him and remain in His love.* ***Amen***

Two weeks ago, you may remember Pete Stoodley preached on earlier verses in John Chapter 6. He gave us an overview of what is known as the ‘Bread of Life’ discourse.

Today’s seven verses in John Chapter 6 continue to develop this theme, be it in a rather circular way! Next week Sally will conclude this series on the ‘Bread of Life’ discourse. (PAUSE)

In making sense of the seven verses selected for today, I’m going to **recap** on the things that came before as they are repeated throughout the text and built on by Jesus.

The wider context is the feeding of the 5000. Hungry people have actually just eaten bread and fish, so **as is** characteristic of John’s gospel, a ‘*spiritual*’, metaphorical meaning is attached to a real physical event. They didn’t understand. They thought it was about loaves and fish. It was really about life and where life comes from!

In the feeding of the 5000 miracle, John the author of the gospel attaches a ‘*spiritual*’, metaphorical meaning to a real physical event.

To help us understand the metaphor *of feeding* or *eating;* some of the following phrases may be familiar to us such as ‘we *devour* books’, ‘we *drink in* lectures’, ‘we s*wallow* stories’, ‘*ruminate* *on* ideas’, ‘*chew over* a matter’*, ‘eat* our own words’ and doting grandparents declare that they could ‘*eat up’* their grandchildren!

I wonder if you can remember using or remember hearing others use, any of those phrases? (PAUSE)

In the feeding of the 5000 miracle, Jesus provides for the needs of his people, both physically and spiritually, *feeding* the people with both **words** and **bread**. They ‘*all had enough to* ***eat****’*, they ‘*had their fill’. (PAUSE)*

In the next section of the discourse we see that Jesus is making a distinction between food which ‘*perishes*’ and food which ‘*endures to eternal life*’. The destiny of the food is linked to the destiny of people, in response to Jesus. There is a divide between those who ‘*perish*’ and those who ‘*abide*’ in Jesus. Those who abide in Jesus inherit ‘*eternal life’*.

Here the sobering, memorable phrase ‘***you are what you eat*’**applies.

It’s really about life and where life comes from!

Is the bread which **we** eat ***perishable*** or does it ***endure*** to eternal life? (Pause)

What comes to our minds when we think about **perishable** food?

There is a pencil and paper on the pew to give us a moment to reflect on our lives and to consider perishable food, perhaps non - spiritual sustenance and nourishment that is short lived, that does not last forever. A diet that leaves us empty and hollow, hungry and dissatisfied with life. Perhaps despite family and friends, we find no place in which we really belong.

A moment to reflect in the silence, you won’t be asked to share it with anyone. I’ll bring us back after a couple of minutes – **Perishable food –** entertainment, activities of fleeting value, worldly thinking/temptations of the world, distractions?

“***Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you***”

There is a progression of ideas in John Chapter 6, Jesus first declares himself to be ‘*the bread of life’*, then that he has ‘*come down from heaven*’; then in the words of the religious people of the day; Jesus is the ‘*bread that came down from heaven*’ and finally in this week’s reading, beginning at v51 that Charlene’s just read for us - Jesus is ‘***the living bread*** *that came down from heaven*’.

Jesus feeds all who **come** to him. Whoever eats ‘**the *living bread***’ will never hunger and will live.

There is a parallel between ‘*believing in*’ the one who the Father has sent - Jesus and ‘*eating’* the *‘bread of life’.*

*‘Feeding’* on Jesus is a strong metaphor for ‘*believing’ and* trustinghim - ‘*who comes to me/shall not hunger/who believes in me/shall never thirst*’.

And now another moment to turn over the piece of paper.

It’s really about life and where life comes from!

What comes to your mind when you think about food which endures, that lasts forever? Nourishment that is more than physical or biological. Spiritual sustenance that is beyond words, difficult to describe, moments of wonder or holiness that we wish would never end, when time seems to stand still. When somehow we are more fully alive than ever before. Perhaps we get a taste of it when we love deeply.

A moment to write on the back of the piece of paper and reflect, I’ll bring us back after a couple of minutes – **Food which endures –** metaphorically **-** in our lives**.**

Jesus adds a further layer by explaining that this bread ‘*is my flesh that I will give for the life of the world*’. The language of ‘giving’ of his ‘flesh’ is a reference to Jesus offering himself in his death on the cross.

Right at the end of Pete’s sermon, he left us with a cliff-hanger of a question “*How do we eat and drink of Christ?*” (You may remember his dramatic ending - “*over to you – Amen”!)*

Some of us shared a conversation with Pete after the service, in the J.A.M. – ‘Just a minute’ session. An opportunity to share thoughts and wisdom from our faith experiences, bringing in Bible knowledge with the intention of encouraging each other into the week ahead. We’ll have the opportunity to do that again, this morning, after the service.

*Pete’s question ‘How do we eat and drink of Christ?’* has similarities with the question that the religious people of Jesus’s day were sharply disputing among themselves, that we heardin v52 of today’s reading. “*How can this man give us His flesh to eat*?”

Another way of putting it is *what does it mean to* ***eat Jesus***?

So if we *‘eat Jesus’ flesh’,* if we feed on Him, we live, **because** of Him*.* Because He offered his life for our sake, we live fully, with meaning and purpose.

We eat and digest His life, His love, His mercy, receive His forgiveness, His compassion, we imitate Him, we feed on His words, we adopt His priorities, experience His presence and share His relationship with the Father.

If we feed on this living bread, we will never go hungry. If we believe and trust in Jesus we will never thirst*.*  Belief in Him satisfies our hunger and thirst for God.

“*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and* ***I will raise Him up on the last day***”.

Amen

1150 words