

## Readings for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

11<sup>th</sup> August 2024

### First Reading: 1 Kings 19:4-8

Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.' He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

### Second Reading: Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

### Gospel: St John 6:35, 41-45

Jesus said to the crowd, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

## **A Reflection for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**

*From Rev'd David Higgon*

Jesus tells those who are following him that 'he is the bread of life and that whoever comes to him will never be hungry and who ever believes in him will never be thirsty'. For the poor and the marginalised this must have sounded like a promise that would lift them from their daily struggle for food.

They had witnessed Jesus feeding a crowd of five thousand people, so no wonder the crowd followed him because this guy can really feed the poor and hungry. They want to make him their earthly king who will give them bread that will fill their stomachs, not the bread that Jesus was referring to, that will feed them spiritually for eternity.

I love bread and especially home baked bread; I also really enjoy making it, the mixing, kneading and baking, although to be honest I mostly use a bread maker to save time. The bread we buy in Tesco's is a long way from home baked bread, but it is convenient, so we don't have to go through the time-consuming process of making our own.

The references to bread in John's gospel relate to both the bread that nourishes our bodies as well as being a symbol of Jesus who nourishes our spiritual life. Jesus has a problem in getting those who follow him to understand bread in a symbolic or spiritual way. He says to the crowd, 'you are only here for bread to eat', meaning that they are moved by their bellies and not by their hearts. They want Jesus to provide a continuous supply of bread in the same way that God had given manna to their ancestors when they were led by Moses from slavery into the promised land.

The people who followed Jesus were looking for a Messiah, for a saviour, who would lift their yoke of oppression and who would lead them out of poverty and who would give them each day their daily bread. They saw in Jesus someone who would lead them into a new future, the promised kingdom of God. But Jesus attempts to get the crowd to see that there is more to the bread he is offering than just filling their stomachs.

Bread remains a powerful symbol to the poor and hungry of the world. The battle cry of the Russian Revolution of 1917 was Bread, Peace and Land. In these three words was found both the immediate needs and the future hopes of Russian peasants and workers who were facing severe food shortages along with all the horrors of the First World War.

The importance of bread makes less sense to us today than it did for the generation that witnessed the first world war, for we have come a long way from understanding the importance of bread to that generation.

Let me read you a poem by David Scott.

### **A Long way from bread**

1

We have come so far from bread

Rarely do we hear the clatter of the mill wheel;

See the flour in every cranny, the shaking down of the sack, the chalk on the door,

The rats, the race, the pool,

Baking day, and the old loaves

Cob, cottage, plaited, brick.

We have come a long way from bread,

Once the crock said 'BREAD'

And the bread was what was there,

and the family's arm went deeper down each day

To find it, and the crust was favoured.

We have come a long way from bread,

Terrifying is the breach between wheat and table;

Wheat and bread, bread and what goes for bread.

Loaves come now in regiments, so that loaf

Is not the word. *Hlaf\**

Is one of the oldest words we have.

2

I go on about bread

Because it was to bread

That Jesus trusted

The meaning he had of himself.

it was an honour for bread to be the knot in the Lord's handkerchief

reminding him about himself. So,

O bread, breakable;

O bread, given;

O bread, a blessing;

Count yourself lucky bread.

3

Not that I am against wafers,

Especially the ones produced under steam

From some hidden nunnery

With our Lord crucified into them.

They are at least unleavened and fit the hand,

Without remainder, but it is still

A long way from bread.

Better for each household to have its own bread,

Daily, enough to spare

Dough the size of a rolled towel,

For feeding angels unawares.

Then if the bread is holy,

All that has to do with bread is holy:

Board, knife, cupboard,  
So that the gap between all things is closed  
In our attention to the bread of the day.

4

I know that  
'man cannot live by bread alone'.  
I say, let us get the bread right.

*David Scott Anglican priest and poet (1947 – 2022)*

*\*Hlaf pronounced laf is the Anglo Saxon word for loaf/bread.*

Each Sunday at our Eucharist, thin, unleavened communion wafers play a pivotal role in the act of Holy Communion, symbolizing the body of Christ and serving as a sacred element of the Christian faith. In the early Christian era, the use of unleavened bread for the Eucharist became the standard practice, reflecting the influence of Jewish customs and the scriptural accounts of the Last Supper. Historical records indicate that by the Middle Ages, the practice of using small, unleavened wafers for the Eucharist had become widespread within the Western Church.

The ingredients of communion wafers are minimalistic, reflecting the symbolic purity and simplicity associated with the Eucharistic elements. Traditionally, communion wafers are made from wheat flour and water, with the exclusion of any leavening agents such as yeast. This uncomplicated recipe aligns with the historical use of unleavened bread and its association with the Jewish Passover and the Last Supper of Jesus.

The significance of communion wafers in Christianity is deeply rooted in the theological understanding of the Eucharist as a sacred sacrament that embodies the spiritual presence of Christ.

So the act of consuming the communion wafers is imbued with profound symbolism, representing the incorporation of Christ's presence into the lives of the faithful and the unity of believers within the body of Christ. David Scott says in his poem, that he is not against communion wafers, but he does say that they are a long way from bread, As believers, when we partake of the Eucharist together, we express our shared faith and participation in the life of the Church. For many Christians, the communion wafers represent a tangible encounter with the divine, offering spiritual sustenance, healing, and renewal. but we should also remember that Jesus used common daily bread as the symbol for himself, 'the knot in the Lord's handkerchief', reminding him about himself.

The thing about bread is that it is only truly blessed when it is broken and shared with the hungry and the stranger as well as with family and friends. It is in its sharing that bread, ordinary bread, itself becomes holy. In sharing bread, the gap between the rich and poor can be bridged and the gap between that material and spiritual is closed. In all the turmoil and chaos, the anger, violence and hatred of last week's rioting across the country, one event stood out for me and that was when the Imam of a mosque in Liverpool offered anti Muslim protestors gathered outside his mosque burgers and chips and soft drinks. An act of generous sharing that helped to defuse that confrontation.

Let us pray:

As they face this day, O God, give bread to those who are hungry

Let this be the day when children's mouths are filled

And swollen bellies are no more.

Let this be the day when bread falls from the sky

And peace reigns on the battlefield.

Amen.