

Bread of Heaven

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on August 1st, 2021 John 6:24-35 & Exodus 16)

Bread of Heaven

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on August 1st, 2021 John 6:24-35 & Exodus 16)

There is nothing like the smell of freshly baked bread. I used to bake my own bread (albeit using a bread machine – when they were popular twenty years ago) and loved the smell that permeated the whole house as it was cooking. You could set it to cook overnight and wake up to the smell of bread baking. Each week I would take a loaf to be used for communion at the Moreland Church and the Brunswick Church. The smell would permeate the church as well. Orthodox churches in some places have people baking the bread for communion in the church buildings whilst the service is on, and bring it in at the appropriate time.

Many times my Dad would tell the story of how he would be sent to buy bread for the family and couldn't resist it on the way home, – he would pull out the middle of it and eat some and then pack it back in. When his father went to slice it, of course it would fall to pieces, but Dad would have already taken off up a tree in order to avoid a hiding. Think he got the hiding when he got down the tree sometime later, probably lured in by the smell of the bread.

Bread is evocative. It is a reminder of home, of love, of comfort, of the simple things in life. It is an everyday thing, ordinary in some senses. It is relatively affordable for all people – kings and paupers alike. Bread is simple and a staple. It is made from simple ingredients – flour, water, salt and yeast. All that are readily available and store well. It is a symbol of hospitality and sometimes reconciliation – breaking bread together brings people together. It is everyone's food.

Bread comes in many forms. Flat, sourdough, grain, rye, tortilla, naan, bagel and you can add to the list. Some cultures may not have bread, but they will have a staple like bread – rice, potatoes. The making of bread involves activity and patience – it needs kneading, proving (which means having to wait), kneading again, baking and sharing.

The Israelites found themselves hungry in the wilderness and wished they were back in slavery as at least there they had their fill of bread. God hears their complaints and rains down on them bread from heaven, but bread only enough for one day. When the 'flaky substance' lands, they don't know what it is and Moses needs to remind them, that they were complaining and God had responded. This story reminds them and us that God always wants life and will give us that which we need, that God provides with compassion even when we grumble and complain.

Jesus broke bread in many places. He took loaves and fishes and feed thousands gathered on the grass. He broke bread with prostitutes and tax collectors. He took bread and gave it to his friends during his last meal and told them to remember this as a sign. The couple on the road to Emmaus only recognised him after he took bread and broke it. In the prayer that he taught his followers to say, there is a plea to receive our daily bread – our daily nourishment. All these moments of breaking bread foreshadow the great heavenly banquet we are all invited to and look forward to.

In our reading today Jesus calls himself the Bread of Life. This is one of the 'I Am' sayings we find in John. There are six others – I am the Good Shepherd, I am the True Vine, I am the Resurrection and Life, I am the Gate, I am the Light of the World and I am

Bread of Heaven

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on August 1st, 2021 John 6:24-35 & Exodus 16)

the Way, the Truth and the Life. All reminiscent of God saying to Moses when asked who he was – I AM who I AM and I Am who I will be.

The people want this bread of which Jesus speaks, they want to know how and where to get it. Jesus reveals himself to be that which will sustain them, that which will nourish them, that which will feed their stomachs and souls. And how to get it – simple just believe that Jesus is the one sent from God.

As we ponder this story, perhaps we need to ask ourselves a couple of questions.

1. What does it mean for you to say Jesus is the bread of life?
2. How does Jesus, the bread of life and your relationship with him satisfy and sustain you?
3. And then by implication how do you or how can you share that bread of life with others?

Bread is universal, is foundational and is usually shared. The bread of life – Jesus – is universal, foundational and to be shared. Bread is simple, a sign of hospitality, available to all and brings people together. Bread nourishes and keeps hunger at bay.

As we participate in communion today I hope that we might look at what we do differently, maybe hold the bread in your hand for a while longer as you ponder the way in which Jesus nourishes you. Think about who you share the bread with today. Think about how you might leave this place and share the bread of life with others.

Jesus is the bread of life, the bread of heaven, the bread of tomorrow. The bread of life broken for all. God gave enough bread to the Israelites so that they might have their fill. Jesus gave the crowds bread, so that they might have their fill. Jesus, the bread of life, offers himself to us to nourish and sustain us in this life and the next, so believe and have you fill. Amen.