



Sunday
August 4th, 2024

Pentecost 11B

Bread of Heaven

Breaking Open the Word

**Pentecost 11
Liturgical Year B**



**St Peter's by the Lake
PAYNESVILLE**

Anglican Diocese of
Gippsland



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St Peter's by the Lake

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Five loaves, two fish

READINGS

1 Kings 19.4-8
Psalm 34.1-8
Ephesians 4.25 - 5.2
John 6.35, 41-51



Short Summary	4
Introduction	5
Sermon	9
Icebreaker	8
Discussion Questions	9
Five Days of Meditation and Prayer	15



Summary



“

I AM the bread of life

”

John 6

Dennis’s sermon “Bread of Heaven” stresses true communion, community unity, and discipleship. He explores the importance of gathering, acknowledging shortcomings, and praying for God’s work.

Emphasising the bread’s symbolic role and sacramental rules, he guides the community towards unity.

The sermon concludes with a call to discipleship, linking faith, communion, and service in the world.

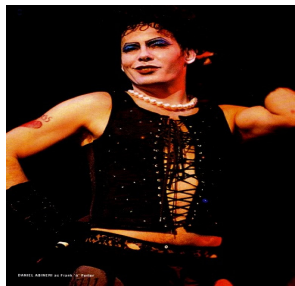
INTRODUCTION

During an “exposition” session before the “benediction”, I was at St Francis in the City. The sacrament was on display in the monstrance. My cheeky Anglican sense of irreverence came to the fore as I remembered the ancient rhyme,

Hello, Lord Jesus, up there in your box:
we haven't come to eat you,
but only to watch.

My irreverence was then disturbed by a cleaning lady who appeared from nowhere and vacuumed the carpet in front of the monstrance. And that, to me, was as it should be. Christ is in the world, and we all have work to do. Even in the Gospel, the people demanded that Jesus be told, “What work must we do?” Jesus said to them, “Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

Jesus' response indicates that the way to God by means of the works of the Law is but a shadow of the possibility he offers them. Access to God is only through the Son who makes God known (cf. 1:18). The only way to do the work of God (ton ergon tou theou) is to believe in the one whom God has sent (v. 29).¹



As I watched the ‘hoovering’ end, more words from John 6 came to mind.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but raise it on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life, and I will raise them on the last day.’²

That may be why the vacuuming was significant. We are all being gathered. Again, my devious mind moved to a chapter in Neil Boyd's book, “Bless Me, Father,” brought to life by the wonderful and late Arthur Lowe.

Father Neil, a priest in his first year, held a youth mass in the Rectory, and the only bread he had was crumbling rolls. Once all had gone home, he noticed the consecrated bread crumbs on the floor. He immediately vacuumed up the crumbs, but he had a moment of conscience later in the night. The bread was consecrated. Unable to work out (typical male) how to empty the bag, he took the Hoover up into the yard and buried it, following the rule “it shall go to ground.”

When the gardener brought to Father Duddleswell's attention the issue of the vacuum cleaner in the garden being “full of bread,” a lot of explaining was needed!

Daniel Abiniri, who played the wet behind-the-ears curate Father Neil, was also cast as Frank'n'Furter in the Rocky Horror Picture Show as they were recording the series.

I remember seeing that the Daily Mail ran an article on Daniel with the byline,

“Priest by Day, Transexual by Night.”

Ahh, and we're all made in the image of God!

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may be your eyes, ears, hands and voice.



True communion is not the receiving of the sacrament; it is the sharing of the sacrament in the community. We genuinely receive by gathering together, setting aside and acknowledging our tendency not to obey the word of God fully, and praying to do the work of God through, with, and in. In breaking the bread and reaching out in faith, we are nourished. And once nourished, we begin the work in the wider world as disciples of Christ.

The bread that Jesus gave, unlike the bread of the wilderness, was replenished daily, for it did not last. Whilst sustained on the way of Exodus, the will of God was to be obedient (that is, to listen and interpret) to the laws to proclaim, sustain and enhance life. The laws were not to be deified but essential to be read, learned, inwardly digested and applied. They were never meant to be the sole purpose of existence, but rather, to be lived for the betterment of all in the unity of the people. And again, we come to that word, community. To be in communion is to be united at the table.

A profound moment occurs when we 'do this in remembrance of me'. We are called not to the table of the Church but rather to the table of the Lord. A foretaste of the heavenly banquet, as reminded in Sirach, chapter 24,

19 Come to me, all you that want me,
and eat your fill of my fruit.

20 You will remember me as sweeter than
honey,
better than honey from the comb.

21 Eat me, and you will hunger for more;
drink me, and you will thirst for more.

The fullness of what is required follows.

22 Obey me, and you will never have cause
for embarrassment;

do as I say, and you will be safe from sin."

Obey. Take counsel. Apply.

Wash. Rinse. Repeat.

In receiving the sacrament, the living bread of heaven, we are not in a passive moment of dwelling in the past; we are opening the way to the future. "Anyone who comes to me" is not the same as "All those who have arrived..." The community, the sharing, and participation in the bread for the morrow, our daily bread, is required to live in fullness the word of God, loving, serving, restoring, and caring. The memorial reminds "why we do this" and "what is required."

When we gather, we gather together as a motley crew. The words of the late Graham Maule, as set by John L. Bell, forever are etched in my understanding: "He has come to make a difference with fishermen and fools." We excel in our individuality, yet it is in the sharing of the presence of God, the *imago dei*, that we have commonality.

Look at us! Born here, born elsewhere, lived here, lived there, family builder, family provider, professional and graduate, university of life entire of wisdom and common sense. Of different heritage, family and kin, able, disabled, mute, loud, offensive and attractive, married, divorced, widowed, alternate relationships, celibate and on we could go. High Church, low church, pentecostal, literal, charismatic, pious. And all of us here as the body of Christ. Paul speaks of being joined at the ligaments. If the ligament is strained or ruptured, the whole body is out.

We could work on preventing the tear or rupture. We could also work on the rehabilitation. The worst-case scenario is to cut it out. All ligaments have an essential function, but each ligament has an extraordinary relationship in the body. They may have the same name, but they are all



Come, let us take this holy sacrament in remembrance that Christ died for us, and feed on him by faith with thanksgiving.



Book of Common Prayer

different. And for acknowledging that when we all come together, it is unity. A common unity. A community.

Gathering all this together is the action of the common unity, the communion. God and humanity are sat down at the table. By sharing the reconciliation that is the story of Jesus, we nourish ourselves for what is required of us together. The sacrament is not to be lifted and adored, wrote the Parliament of England, forming the thirty-nine Articles of Religion.

Jesus did not institute a memorial or gravestone; he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." This action calls us, having heard and praised the Word of God, to now take, taste, and drink spiritually

So, what are we called to believe when we face this question, "Well, what is it?" The late Theologian Tad Guzie wrote prolifically about transubstantiation, that is, the belief that it is the body and blood of Christ when the priest says, "This is..." and thus it remains so—the answer to "how", transubstantiation, is a very clever answer to a ridiculous question.

Guzie also suggested that being ordained was not required to remember Jesus, and after he was removed from the Church by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, the former

Jesuit and his wife Noreen would often have friends over to dinner in the Calgary home, where Noreen would preside at the Eucharist.³

It is in the breaking, sharing and faith that Jesus dwells in us, and we in him. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We are gathered to Jesus so that, following his commands, we may be collected on the last day. The simple act of taking bread and wine and giving thanks, a task that every Jewish household did then and still today, was instituted into something else. "Every time you do this, remember me."

So, what is this bread from heaven? Does it change? Should we adore it? Should we even need to debate it? And what about all the rules around it? They guide us in gathering and being in a common unity, a community, and communing. And from there, we go into the world to serve in love and peace, nourished by the bread of heaven.

The many Welsh choirs of the future would echo the people at the time of Jesus:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed us now and ever more,
feed us now and evermore.

When we are fed with the bread of heaven,



we are called to be disciples participating in the mission of the Church. All the Church does is mission. Liturgy means “the work of the people.” I do understand that for some, the work is, at times, hard work, but still, we persevere! To be called into active discipleship is risky.

Benedictine nun Sr Joan Chittister wrote of the call to be disciples as being complicit in a change to how we see ourselves, our relationship with God, and our neighbours. Joe wrote,

“Discipleship is an attitude of mind, a quality of soul, a way of living that is not political but has serious political implications.”⁴

I wish to finish with one more theologian’s thoughts today. This theologian was only twelve when she wrote her thoughts on communion. In 1545, Princess Elizabeth was exploring her understanding of the many reformations occurring in England. This simple understanding she wrote was again seen as influential in the English Settlement Acts and even in her coronation.

Centre to her belief was that the notion of ‘what is this?’ was not the question. What was the centre of the service was the breaking and giving. She wrote:

‘Twas God the word that spake it,
He took the bread and brake it;
And what the word did make it;
That I believe, and take it.⁵

In faith, she receives. This premise is still with us today in our mainstream Anglican understanding.

The Elizabethan Prayer Books invite you to communion with these words. There is no need for consent or an Amen; you only have to bring yourself to receive.

“Come, let us take this holy sacrament in remembrance of Christ’s death for us and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.”

And I will add for my belief, “This is the table, not of the Church, but of the Lord. All are welcome at his table. Come.”

End Notes

1. Moloney, Francis J.. Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John (p. 347). Liturgical Press. Kindle Edition.
2. John 6.39-40
- 3 various online tributes to the late Tad Guzie, 2001
4. Sr Joan Chittister OSB, 2001, Dublin
5. The Princess Elizabeth, 1545

Icebreaker!



What’s the most unusual food you’ve ever tried, and did you like it?



GROUP DISCUSSION

Question 1

How does the concept of communion relate to unity within the community?

Dennis mentioned that communion is about sharing with the community and gathering together.

In what ways can you actively participate in forging this unity in your church community?

Question 2

What role does the bread of heaven play in our spiritual lives?

The sermon mentioned that the bread serves as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice.

How can we use this reminder to guide our daily actions and decisions?

Question 3

What is the difference between the bread of the wilderness and the bread Jesus gives?

The bread of the wilderness sustained the people during the Exodus, while the bread Jesus gives replenishes daily.

How can this difference influence your relationship with God?

Question 4

Why is it important to gather as a diverse community during communion?



The sermon references a quote stating that Jesus came to make a difference with fishermen and fools, signifying the diversity in the community.

How might embracing diversity in your church community lead to a strong sense of unity and purpose?

Question 5

How does the call to discipleship tie into communion and unity within the community?

The call to discipleship and the mission of the Church involves political implications and changing our relationships with God and others.

What actions could you take to answer the call to discipleship and promote unity in your life and community?

End notes and further reading

N.T. Wright, **Paul for Everyone, Ephesians**, Westminster John Knox Press

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John

Sacra Pagina

Author Francis Maloney

Publisher Liturgical Press, 2016

Pray...

- To gather in the spirit of community and communion.
- To help us fully receive the sacrament and nourish our faith.
- To guide us in living out the message of love, service, and restoration in the week ahead.



Brabarlung Totem
This is produced on
Gunaikurnai Land, and our
respects are paid to the First
Nations people everywhere.



August beginnings

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore the themes of true communion, community, and discipleship and how they relate to our daily lives and faith journeys. Join us as we reflect, pray, and grow together.

Day 1 Scripture: John 6:35

We begin our devotional journey with the profound truth that Jesus is the bread of life. True communion isn't merely about receiving the sacrament; it's about sharing it within the community and embodying the message daily. Just as the bread given in the wilderness was replenished daily, our nourishment comes from gathering together and living out the Word of God.

As we break bread and reach out in faith, we are continually nourished and called to work as disciples in the broader world. Communion is actively participating in God's work, sustaining and enhancing life, and fostering unity within the community.

How does genuinely understanding communion change your approach to it?
How can you actively participate in the community to reflect God's work?
What steps can you take to ensure that your faith nourishes you and those around you?
Pray for a deeper understanding and appreciation of communion.
Ask for guidance in finding ways to contribute to your community.

Day 2 Scripture: Sirach 24:19-22

The Lord's table is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, where we are called to remember, partake, and obey. The Lord's sweetness is likened to honey, continually drawing us closer and deeper in our relationship. As we gather at the Lord's table, we do so not as perfect beings but as a motley crew, diverse yet united in Christ.

Our communion calls us to a life of obedience and application—to live not just for ourselves but for the betterment of all in unity and community. In this sharing and participation, we genuinely find the essence of our faith, reminding us why we gather and what is required of us.

What does it mean to you to partake in the Lord's table?
How can you apply the principles of unity and community in your life?
In what ways can the diverse nature of your community be a strength?
Pray for the ability to see and appreciate the diversity in your community.
Ask for strength and wisdom to live a life of obedience and application.

Day 3 Scripture: Ephesians 4:16

Paul speaks of being joined together at the ligaments, emphasising the importance of each part contributing to the whole. When one part suffers, the entire body is affected. In the same way, our spiritual community relies on each member playing their role, preventing tears and ruptures, and working towards rehabilitation when needed.

Acknowledging the different functions and relationships within the body helps us appreciate each person's unique contributions. Unity in the body of Christ comes from this understanding, fostering a community that is strong and resilient in faith.

How do you see your role within the body of Christ?
What steps can you take to support and strengthen others in your community?
How can you contribute to the unity and health of your spiritual community?
Pray for a clear understanding of your role within the body of Christ.
Ask for the grace to support and strengthen others in their roles.

Day 4 Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:24-25

When we remember Jesus' words, "Do this in remembrance of me," we are called to a profound act of faith. This simple act of breaking bread and sharing the cup transcends time, connecting us to the original Last Supper and fellow believers across the ages. Communion reminds us of Jesus' sacrifice and our call to be his disciples.

By participating in communion, we open the way to the future, continually renewing our commitment to love, serve, restore, and care for one another. The act of communion is not a passive tradition but an active participation in Jesus's life and mission.

What does it mean to you to "remember" Jesus through communion?
How can communion shape your actions and attitudes in daily life?
What new commitments can you make as a disciple of Christ?
Pray for a renewed sense of commitment and purpose as a disciple of Christ.
Ask for inspiration on how to participate actively in Jesus' mission.

Day 5 Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20

Jesus' call for us to make disciples of all nations is the essence of the Church's mission. Liturgy, meaning "the work of the people," underscores that all we do as a church is fundamentally about mission. While discipleship can be challenging, it is also transformative, reshaping our outlook on life, relationships, and faith.

To be a disciple means living in a way that reflects God's love and justice. It means taking risks, persevering through challenges, and being open to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. As we conclude this devotional, we are reminded that our faith journey is an ongoing growth, service, and love process.

How can you actively engage in the mission of making disciples?
What challenges have you faced in your journey of discipleship, and how can you overcome them?
How can you integrate the teachings from this devotional into your daily life?
Pray for courage and perseverance in your journey of discipleship.
Ask for guidance on how to make disciples in your community effectively.

Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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