

**Call to Worship**

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking: “Listen and understand, says the Lord. Come with open hearts and minds to explore and uncover new insight. With story and encounter, argument and influence, passion and heartache, we share in the discovery of faith and community. So, let us worship God.’

**Hymn CH4 147 – All creatures of our God and King,**

**Prayer of Adoration & Praise**

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Living God, we come before you today as your people, a community of faith, a family of hope, a people of love.

We give thanks for your beloved son, our Saviour, our Guide, and our Protector, the Good Shepherd to all your beloved children, wherever we are, whomever we are, whatever we are, we are yours and you are ours.

We give thanks that your constant and unending love knows no borders, no ethnicity, no gender or sexuality, but is poured out freely upon each one of us, today and in perpetuity. In a time of uncertainty and fear, we ask that this love continues to sustain us through whatever trials we face.

As we seek to follow you in this ever-changing world we ask for the wisdom to see your light shining in every person we meet. Let your example of care and compassion for all people be our guiding force.

In the many times that we fail to follow in your footsteps, we ask, not only for forgiveness, but for boldness and surety in our ability to carry on, to return to your path. No matter how many times we may falter we pray that we will always know that you stand with us.

God of all, merciful and loving, we come before you, in faith, hope, and love, today and every day.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

**Theme Introduction: 'Give us a sign!'**

**Reading: John: 35, 41 – 51**

<sup>35</sup> "I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty.

<sup>41</sup> The people started grumbling about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> So they said, "This man is Jesus son of Joseph, isn't he? We know his father and mother. How, then, does he now say he came down from heaven?"

<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered, "Stop grumbling among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> People cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me; and I will raise them to life on the last day. <sup>45</sup> The prophets wrote, 'Everyone will be taught by God.' Anyone who hears the Father and learns from him comes to me. <sup>46</sup> This does not mean that anyone has seen the Father; he who is from God is the only one who has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> I am telling you the truth: he who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. <sup>50</sup> But the bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If you eat this bread, you will live forever. The bread that I will give you is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live."

**Hymn CH4 133 – Source and Sovereign,**

## **Sermon – ‘You are what you eat’**

For regular attenders or viewers at Eastwood, you will know that I like to pose questions. Now some of these questions, I like to encourage you to suggest answers. Today’s opening question is not like that. Today’s opening question is this: ‘Have you ever been on a diet?’ There are literally thousands of diets out there. Some cut out fats. Some cut out sugar. Some suggest you miss out lunch and drink a low-fat milkshake in its place. Maybe, you’re a little bit like me and enjoy a ‘seafood diet’. You see food and eat it, but that’s another story for another day!

Another question – have you any of your family or friends ever tried the Atkins Diet? Dr Atkins first introduced his diet in the 1960s, however it was not until the 1990s that this diet became popular, and it is estimated that more than twenty million people have attempted to follow Atkins methods

Now, if you are one of those twenty million people, you will know that bread is not allowed, as all those carbohydrates are, allegedly standing in the way of weight loss and improved health.

Yet, bread has a major place in the diet of most of the worlds’ countries. Pita bread, baguettes, ciabatta, nan, soda bread, tortillas, flat bread, these are just some of the types of bread you can find around. Therefore, if you love bread, the Atkins diet might not be the one for you.

Now, when Jesus fed the five thousand on the shores of Galilee, He found out that the crowd like eating bread too. They liked it so much that they wanted to crown him king and followed him back across to the other side of the lake. The crowd must have thought that their futures were beginning to look a little ‘rosy’. If this man Jesus could say a prayer and turn a young lads’ packed lunch into enough food to feed an army, then maybe, He could raise an army and rid them of their Roman occupiers.

However, today’s Gospel reading tells us that the crowd was to be left feeling disappointed. Jesus tells them that He is the Bread of Life, but what does He mean? Bread can sustain life and Jesus refers to Himself as the Bread of Life, to

teach the crowd that what is truly important is not the bread he makes but the Bread that He is. Jesus is saying that to have eternal life, the individual members of the crowd must believe in Him.

Unfortunately, the crowd does not seem to understand what Jesus means. They moan to each other because Jesus said: *'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'* <sup>42</sup> *So they said, "This man is Jesus, son of Joseph, isn't he? We know his father and mother. How, then, does he now say he came down from heaven?"*

This crowd have just made a big mistake. They have judged Jesus on His external appearance. How often have we done the same? We often cannot help making a judgement about a person's character within 3 seconds of meeting them. Surely, we must take care that we never neglect a message from God because we do not care for the messenger. For God, has many messengers and His greatest message came through a Galilean carpenter, yet, it is for this very reason that the Israelites decide to disregard this message.

In today's reading, Jesus is trying to prepare the crowd, and His Disciples, for the events and the sacrifice that was to come. Whilst the people chose not to listen but to grumble amongst one another, Jesus spoke clearly of His coming death, and hinted of the resurrection to come. The miracle, that would bring new life, turning His physical, human, death into a gift of eternal life.

Although Jesus talked about Himself, He also spoke about manna. His audience would have understood everything he said about manna. For, manna was 'the first bread of heaven', given to the Israelites during the time of the Exodus. If I may, I will quickly remind us of this story. Moses freed the people from slavery in Egypt, but it would take forty years to get to the Promised Land. As the days passed, the food they had brought with them for the journey ran out, and with it, their patience and faithfulness.

The Israelites were hungry. They needed food. They need bread and God gave them bread, which the Israelites called 'manna'. When it covered the ground, it looked like frost and tasted so good, that the people lived on manna for forty years.

However, after forty years, manna disappeared, never to be eaten again. Jesus compares Himself to manna, as He is also a gift from God. Yet, Jesus is a gift that will last for eternity. A gift that will be more than enough. Jesus is a gift that will be life-giving, extravagant, and full of Grace. Jesus is much more than manna. Jesus said: *'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If you eat this bread, you will live forever. The bread that I will give you is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live.'*

This would not be the only time that Jesus used bread as symbol. He knew that His friends and followers would require help to understand all that had happened after He ascended to heaven and was no longer physically with them to explain the meanings of things to them. They needed to know that whatever happened in the future, Jesus would never leave them. That He would never stop feeding them.

Even today, we come looking for this symbol that Jesus will never leave us. A month today, here at Eastwood, we will receive that symbol as we participate in Communion. The symbol that Jesus is with us as we the bread and drink from the cup. The bread of communion offers the promise of salvation and Grace, of truth and life. It is indeed the most common of meals for the most common of people.

Yet, if Jesus is the bread, have you ever wondered what we are? Well, I promise I have not gone mad, but, after giving it some thought, I am going to suggest that we are possibly sandwiches. Sandwiches. Jesus is the substance; He is the edges, the structure, and the fuel. He provides the calories and keeps us all together, but we are the filling, personally unique, gifts of holiness, witness, worship, and service.

For what we are and the gifts each one of us has to offer are important. Jesus wants to be in a relationship with each one of us. Those who are in the sanctuary, those watch on the live-stream feed. Those who might be watching the recording on Wednesday or Thursday. Jesus longs to be in a relationship with you. Why? Well, because He loves you, no matter who you are or what

you have done or not done, and Jesus wants to surround us and support us with His love. If we do not have the bread, we are not enough, we cannot be a sandwich without the Bread of Life.

However, we must work to keep ourselves 'fresh', so that we do not become 'stale'. Whatever we are, we are distinct personalities, created uniquely to live and to be loved, to live in God, to live with one another. We are called to be the most we can be, the very best sandwiches, the most faithful, the most alive people we can be.

Having examined today's Gospel reading, maybe it is time for us all to try a new diet. Let us replace our human diets with the sustaining diet of the Bread of Life, for, after all, 'you are what you eat!'

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Hymn CH4 685 – For everyone born, a place at the table,**

#### **Prayer for Ourselves and Others**

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Generous God, we pray for your blessing on this community, as we seek to find you in the midst of fear and trouble, as we search for hope in times of darkness, shine your light into the lives of each one of us, that we may know your love is with us always.

We pray for your whole church, a people attempting to live in your example and spread your message throughout the world, we recognise the difficulties, in this time more than any other that face those bearing witness to you, but we ask that all Christians will have strength in your love, to continue and to flourish.

We pray for the marginal, those on the edges of our society, living in fear or hurt, attempting to overcome great pain, without the comfort and security many of us take for granted. We pray that we, your people, will give everything to help them and that they will find support in you.

We pray for our global community, As the world seems ever smaller, Where one country is not immune from the troubles of another, we ask that leaders and citizens will follow your example of peace, love, and forgiveness, and work towards a better world for all peoples.

Loving God, how we thank you for this time of worship together and as we pray we remember those in our Church family who cannot be with us today. We ask that you will bless them and us. As our services comes towards its ending we pray that each one of us will show your love to the world welcoming friend and stranger alike, bringing your kingdom ever closer, Amen.

**Hymn CH4 167 – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,**

**Benediction**

Lord help me... Lord help us... Lord, hear us... Lord hear the cries of your people.... Go into the week with faith. Go forward into all that awaits in this week, with faith. For the love of God is with you; surrounds and upholds you. May the blessing of the God; Father, Son and Spirit, be with you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.