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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon :
July 29, 2018 ~ “Ninth Sunday of Trinity”

A few weeks ago, I visited a family to see their new baby – who was screaming his head off. Unsurprisingly, some food made all the difference. Go on a long walk on a warm day and the first thing you want to do when you have a stop is to eat and drink something. From the time we are born, we all know the importance of feeding, of taking in fuel for our bodies. Put simply, food becomes a matter of life and death. We know that from the garden – lack of water, lack of proper fertiliser and nutrients kills plants. The same is true for humans – and goodness don't we know that at the moment in this heatwave.

This makes it an ideal picture for illustrating just how important Jesus is to us. In one of the famous “I am” sayings from John's Gospel, it is the one “I am the bread of life” which speaks to us clearly of our relationship with him: it says in clear terms, Jesus brings us life and without him we die. When I baptise a child, the parents and godparents are saying, in effect, we want our child to begin a proper relationship with God through Jesus – and we promise that we will do all within our power to enable that relationship to develop. Whether they succeed or not is often largely up to them, certainly in the first years of a child's life.

But in today's Gospel reading, things are maybe not so clear. The passage sees the crowds as they traipse around following Jesus, many, if not most of them, seeming to regard him as some kind of free meal ticket for the rest of their lives, completely misunderstanding when he speaks of himself as the ‘bread of life’. They assume that

they will never go physically hungry ever again, whereas Jesus was of course speaking of their spiritual hunger being satisfied. Human beings have always been the same. Advertise a bargain or a free offer and they descend in droves. Garden centre. The 'Build-a-Bear' boss had to apologise after 'pay-your-age' sale caused absolute chaos.

What can we draw from this passage? Yes, we see that the people were clinging to his every move, but maybe for the wrong reasons. They were there for what they could get out of it – in this case being freely fed with bread and fish. But, as one commentator has put it “Jesus is not a restaurant where we indulge ourselves and eventually roll home to bed; he is the Bread of Life, and supplies us with the food we need in order to live out his risen life among the people we are led to”. In a similar way, St Paul gives us a picture of such a life worked out carefully in practical terms, fed spiritually into a united body, displaying God’s loving and humility and be aware of the breadth, length, height and depth of God’s love.

So just as we feel after we have eaten a good meal – contented and satisfied and full – that’s how we can feel when we spend time every day in the company of Jesus of Nazareth. Even when we feel we are getting physically older, we can still be spiritually alive and bounding with life and energy, truly alive in God’s company. So come to the altar and be fed – so that we can go out into the world to live and work to God’s praise and glory.