

*'I am the bread of Life' Readings: Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Ephesians 4: 1-16*

*John 6: 24-35 Sermon 02/08/15 Revd Maggie Rode*

How many of you have been to the Zoo and watched the animals and birds being fed? One of the most popular and interesting birds to watch being fed are the penguins. They wait at the same time every day for their food, and are very attached to the keepers that feed them. They feel protected.

And perhaps in the same way the people who got into the boats to follow Jesus after he had fed them were looking for protection - they had been fed and they felt safe. What better way for these crowds following Jesus to feel protected than to attach themselves to him. He has done something remarkable by feeding all these people from one small boy's packed lunch. They are excited. They have followed him and come to him wanting more. Yet Jesus accused them of having the wrong motivation in coming to seek him out "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

Is there really a sharp divide in the Christian life and faith between the two kinds of hunger-- the two kinds of bread? Is the spiritual meaning really much deeper, more significant, and more valuable than the physical meaning? Jesus certainly did not neglect the physical suffering and physical hunger of the people as he shared with them the meaning of God's love. Yet the crowds were having a hard time understanding all of this. Jesus points out that the physical food perishes; the kind of food he is talking about lasts forever.

Perhaps to make it easier to understand we can look at our spiritual food as nourishing us in the same sort of way as our physical food. As our bodies are nourished by food, our souls need nourished by Jesus. We feed on Jesus by prayer, Bible reading, weekly worship and sacraments and by life in the Spirit. Prayer is the protein in our spiritual nourishment. Bible reading is the fibre and Church is the carbohydrate. The life giving Spirit corresponds to the vitamins. You need regular doses of all of these for a healthy spiritual diet. So let's look at these one by one.

Prayer is the protein - the part of our diet that develops strong bones and muscles. Regular habits of prayer help us to become spiritually strong, to resist temptation and struggle against what's wrong in the world. Sometimes we feel as if certain things are overwhelming us. To use the phraseology of the hymn 'take it to the Lord in prayer'. Just spending time with Him quietly can be so helpful. If you miss your prayer time one day God won't mind, but you'll suffer. Our prayers are not meant to make God feel good; they are for your sake, to help you keep in touch with Him. It doesn't have to be a special form of words - talk to God as you talk to your friends. Sometimes, though, it does help to have a special form of words and we are very blessed here at Christ Church that we have Morning and Evening Prayer in Church every day Monday to Friday - try it one day - you'll be very welcome.

The Bible is for bulk. Without regular supplies of fibre, your digestive system becomes clogged up. A fixed time for Bible reading each day helps. The Bible isn't always easy to understand and it can be helpful to use Bible reading notes, or a commentary - or like prayer, we can learn from each other by doing it together.

Next we come to our carbohydrate - the Church. Worship gives us our regular supplies of energy. We all have Sundays when we are working, not feeling well, visiting relatives or on holiday. Then we have to offer up a quick prayer and offer God our apologies for our absence. Apart from that, we need regular doses of worship, Sunday by Sunday. During worship we encourage each other - we are a community all worshipping together. We get to know God better. We learn to pray and to understand the Bible, and hopefully the sermon aids that! And, week by week we receive the spiritual nourishment of our Lord in the bread and the wine. There is so much energy to gain to keep you going throughout the week.

And then the Spirit is the life giver - our vitamins - living a life in the power of the Spirit is as essential to our spiritual life as vitamins are to the health of the body.

With this spiritual nourishment, our spiritual life will grow and become strong, with a resilience that will carry us through the hard times, because spiritually we are as fit as a fiddle. Without Jesus, there may be physical existence, but that isn't life in its fullness. Jesus alone can satisfy our spiritual hunger. When we know Him as our friend and Saviour, then through Him, we have a personal relationship with God. Our hungry hearts can be satisfied. Nourished with the true bread, we can have fullness of life, not only in this world, but in the world to come. Jesus said "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" Amen

