

This short act of worship has been produced by Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John for you to use at home or wherever you are and if you are unable to worship in a church building. I trust that you are enjoying summer with all its colour and beauty and God's creation. I pray that you will find the service uplifting and that God will meet you in your need, whatever that might be. Amen.

Call to Worship (Psalm 111, which is the Psalm appointed for today)

**Psalm 111
New International Version**

¹ Praise the LORD.

I will extol the LORD with all my heart
in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

² Great are the works of the LORD;
they are pondered by all who delight in them.

³ Glorious and majestic are his deeds,
and his righteousness endures forever.

⁴ He has caused his wonders to be remembered;
the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

⁵ He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.

⁶ He has shown his people the power of his works,
giving them the lands of other nations.

⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.

⁸ They are established for ever and ever,
enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.

⁹ He provided redemption for his people;
he ordained his covenant forever—
holy and awesome is his name.

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all who follow his precepts have good understanding.
To him belongs eternal praise. Amen

Introduction & Opening prayer

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been hearing Jesus's sayings that he is the "bread of life" and that coming to him is like eating bread such as never to be hungry again. Our gospel passage today gives us an extended discussion of the "I am the bread of life" scenario - a portion in John's gospel known as the "Bread of life discourse".

I would like to invite you to have a piece of bread of any type handy - we will be using it later in the service. Thank you.

Let us pray....

The world belongs to God

The earth and all its people

Love and faith come together

Justice and peace join hands

If Christ's disciples keep silent

These stones would shout aloud

Silence

Creating God, Maker of all: **be with us this day**

Jesus Christ, Bread of life: **be with us this day**

Holy Spirit Breath of life: **be with us this day**

With the whole church we affirm that we are made in God's image, we affirm God's goodness at the heart of humanity. We celebrate the miracle and wonder of life, the unfolding purposes of God, forever at work in ourselves and in the world. Amen.

Silence

For the word of God became flesh and dwelt among us

For the word of God in Jesus

For God's wisdom all around us

For God's word and wisdom in us

Thanks be to God. Amen

(Prayers adapted from Iona community)

Hymn: Speak O Lord as we come to you (Singing the Faith 161)

(Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here)

<https://youtu.be/3tPp8ov7cks>

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.

Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness.

that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.

Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.

Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.

Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

*Keith Getty (b.1974) and Stuart Townend (b.1963) ©2005,
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Prayer of confession

Let us confess our sins.

Silence

**Loving God, we have sinned against you
in what we have thought, said, and done.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves
We are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong.
Forgive us for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen**

Silence

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is his gracious word.
Your sins are forgiven.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

(The Methodist Worship Book p. 29)

A reading from the Old Testament: Proverbs 9:1-6 New International Version

Invitations of Wisdom and Folly

9 Wisdom has built her house;

she has set up its seven pillars.

2 She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;

she has also set her table.

3 She has sent out her servants, and she calls

from the highest point of the city,

4 “Let all who are simple come to my house!”

To those who have no sense she says,

5 “Come, eat my food

and drink the wine I have mixed.

6 Leave your simple ways and you will live;

walk in the way of insight.”

A reading from the New Testament: John 6:51-58
New International Version

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

⁵³ Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Reflection

Jesus says “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6: 51)

As I said in my introduction, Over the last couple of weeks we have been hearing about Jesus’ sayings that “I am the bread of life”. We continue to hear a lot more about these sayings of Jesus - that he is the bread of life, that coming to him is like eating bread such as never to be hungry again. This is because we have a whole portion of John’s gospel referred to as “The Bread of Life discourse”. So we are on a journey with Bread - our gospel passage today gives us an extended discussion of this “I am the bread of life” scenario.

Bread is a universal favourite and has been so throughout the ages. It is a very good source of nourishment and a staple of diets across different cultures. You just have to walk into the bakery section of any large supermarket or grocery store and you will be spoilt for choice.

At our recent summer Fete at the Space (formerly St John Methodist Church), I was fascinated by the collection of different bread types that we were offering. One of the highlights of that event was the BBQ and that drew the crowds in of course! We advertised chicken, hot dogs and burgers.

What we didn't mention was bread which is interesting because each of these items would inherently be accompanied by one kind of bread or another. We had to serve the burgers in a burger bun, the hot dogs in a hot dog roll, the chicken with either pitta bread or French baguette or Italian ciabatta or the Turkish Yufka or Indian naan bread or Roti which is also popular among the Caribbean people or any of the rustic or flat bread types around the world.

It was such a wonderful event that brought people of different cultures and backgrounds together. Bread brings people together. Bread can be a transforming meal. We share bread at breakfast or lunch clubs, we share bread when we distribute food parcels to the neediest in our communities, we share bread at church when we come together around the communion table and partake in Holy Communion. It is here that we encounter bread used as a metaphor for the incarnation: We hear the words "The body of Christ broken for you or Bread of Heaven, take and eat". Mysterious bread, isn't it? In the bread broken, we will know Jesus. Just as the encounter with his friends on the road to Emmaus.

We know that the early church has sometimes been accused of cannibalism when they celebrated Holy Communion, as people took literally what it means to eat human flesh and drink human blood. Christians believe that in Holy Communion, the

bread is the flesh of Jesus, and the wine is his blood and not in literal sense of course.

The Pandemic catapulted many households into acquiring baking skills and embracing the challenge and opportunity that comes with kneading flour and baking and sharing bread. Do you remember back in April 2020, in the early days of the pandemic when there was a shortage of flour in the supermarkets and shops and online stores due to people turning to baking for comfort? Baking bread had become a pastime in lockdown and was helping a lot of people deal with the trauma and stress that the pandemic has brought upon their lives. The process of baking bread can be quite messy as flour mixed with water and yeast etc can be sticky but out of this messiness comes delicious nourishing bread. Christ's incarnation brought light out of darkness, order out of chaos.

I think that bread is special, and this is why I believe it makes such a beautiful metaphor for the incarnation. *"I am the bread of life Jesus says.... This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*

We are confronted with the deep meaning of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus is the living bread sent from God and that this bread is his flesh. To live forever we must eat his flesh and drink his blood. In the following verses, Jesus does not directly

contradict those who take him literally, but he does challenge us to think.

Jesus is promising eternal life to those who follow in his footsteps, and he exhorts his followers to emulate and become like him using mundane things in his “I am” sayings such as “I am the Light of the world,” (John 8: 12) “I am the Door”, (John 10: 9) I am the Good Shepherd”, (John 10: 11,14) “I am the Vine” (John 15:1, 5) etc and today “I am the Bread.” (John 6:35...) to point to profound spiritual truths about God and God’s relationship with us. And it is this truth that Jesus offers today when he says in John 6: 53-58

“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

And it is this truth that he offered to Peter and to us in John 13: 8, when he said to Peter *“unless I wash you, you have no part in me” (John 13: 8)*. It is this truth that he offered to the

Samaritan woman at the well when he says *“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asked you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water...”*(John 4: 10) And it is this truth that he offers to us when he says in John 4: 4 *“whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them, a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John4: 14)*

The similarity of the gospel passage to the Old Testament scripture is that there is an exhortation and encouragement to be wise. The writer of the proverbs passage in the Old Testament reading is inviting *“All who are simple to come to my house...to come eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed....to walk in the way of insight”*. Wisdom is so important for us right now. *“Choose ye this day who ye shall serve” (Joshua 24: 14-15)*.

It is interesting that amid the turmoil of what is going on in the world with Covid-19 variants, with floods and bush fires, we are encouraged to use wisdom in our daily living. We must discern when and where, for example to use our face masks, or to social distance ourselves from people. We have to decide whether it would be in our best interest to visit certain places, to travel abroad etc. We must make wise judgments.

Jesus is the embodiment of God’s wisdom and as we relate to

him, we are nourished into living wisely, proclaiming love and grace, and creating a better society.

We are recipients of God's grace and we have been shown what is good and what is needed "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8) Jesus the incarnate one, declares that God cares about our spiritual as well as physical needs too. Jesus is the living bread sent from God. It is through the tangible materiality of bread and wine for example that we experience the intangible grace of God. As God provided Manna for God's people in the desert and averted the threat of starvation, so will God sustain us through his bountiful provision, not just in the present, but into eternal life as well.

The validity of the Church's social action is clearly to be seen not only in meeting the physical needs of people and their basic rights but also providing a spiritual understanding of the implications of God's love of humanity in all its sinfulness. God in Jesus is the source and provider of the power to bring about change and to transform the world. The church is given these gifts both individually and corporately.

And so, I finish with those words of Jesus again that I started with: *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* (John 6: 51)

I wonder in this time: is there anything preventing you from believing this statement of Jesus? What signs are you waiting for, in order to take the next step of faith? Amen.

Prayers of Intercessions

During our prayers of Intercession, I invite you to now take your piece of bread that I asked you to have ready earlier. As you sit with your bread in your hand, let your senses guide you. The response is:

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Silence

We call to mind the political leaders of the world and pray for wisdom and discernment for them in carrying out their leadership duties. That they might lead with integrity

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Silence

We call to mind all those responsible for providing food for others. Those who feed the world...the farmers, those working in hospitality providing meals through various outlets. We continue to pray for the fellowship of our churches that our

eyes might be open to all sorts of new possibilities of mission and ministry.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Silence

We call to mind strangers in our midst. Those who we might need to feed. We lift up those who are hungry, those sleeping rough, those facing uncertainties about their health, relationships or jobs. We remember the way the early Church lived breaking bread in their homes and sharing. May we too be always mindful of the needs of those less fortunate than ourselves and always lay a table in which all are welcome.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Silence

We call to mind those who are anxious and drowning in fear today. Those who have lost everything, those who have been affected by floods or fire or other natural or human made disasters. We pray for peace for the anxious, courage for the fearful and rest for the weary.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Sunday, 15th August 2021

Silence

We call to mind those who now walk in the valley of the shadow of death. We know that you are with them and have gone before them to prepare a table overflowing with all good things. Guide those who mourn the loss of a loved one and uphold them in their sorrow with the assurance of your goodness and love.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Silence

We continue to give thanks for the gift of the covid-19 vaccine which is being rolled out across the world. We praise you for the brighter, warmer, and longer days of summer. For the gift of holidays and refreshments. For family and friends and for the gift of technology that enables us to stay connected with people.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Silence

We call to mind our work in this circuit. We pray for our Superintendent and the circuit leadership team as they continue to make decisions and plans for Mission and ministry.

We ask for wisdom and discernment for all our outreach projects. We pray for renewed strength and sustenance. Guide us each day as we minister to one another, to our community and to the world. Help us each day to bear witness to your name and to do your bidding, always mindful of your amazing love for us. We pray these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Hymn: Fight the good fight with all your might (Singing the Faith 634)

(Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here)

<https://youtu.be/DBiQtRnZJt8>

Fight the good fight with all your might;
Christ is your strength and Christ your right;
lay hold on life, and it shall be
your joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,
lift up your eyes, and seek his face;
life with its way before you lies;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside; upon your guide
lean, and his mercy will provide;
lean and the trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

Faint not nor fear, his arm is near;
he changes not, and you are dear;
only believe, and prove it true
that Christ is all in all to you.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811-1875)

Benediction

In Work and Worship: **God is with Us**

Gathered and Scattered: **God is with us**

Now and Always: **God is with us**

May the bread of heaven, the source of eternal life feed us till we want no more. May the wisdom of God, the Eternal word, the nourishment of Jesus Christ, the Bread of life and the joy of the Holy spirit, rest remain and abide with us this day and forevermore. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen

(Adapted from Iona community)

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