

## Ordinary 18 to Ordinary 22

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Year B Ordinary 18

John 6. 24 - 35

### Life Unfolded

John 6.26 Jesus said; You are looking for me because you ate the bread... Not because you understood my miracles

### Why are you here?

It was in the synagogue at Capernaum that the searching crowd found Jesus.  
There they were confronted by his implied question ...  
*Why are you here?*

*What have you come for?*

Imagine being face to face with Jesus - perhaps in worship  
How would we re-act to him saying to us, *Why have you come?*

And, with all honesty, we may respond with a variety of answers;  
*A sense of duty - to support the work and the fellowship*  
*A need - of friendship - of people*  
*Because many years ago I was made to come - and the habit - good habit - never left me*  
*A commitment to the future - here for others - for mission and gospel witness*  
*To worship - to draw close to God - to find inner strength for the days ahead*

More important and much deeper is the question - **WHO** are you here for?  
which was the question underlying the whole of John's account of the events following the miracle of feeding a great crowd with a few scraps of bread and fish

Many in the crowd which found Jesus in the Capernaum synagogue may well have given an honest answer:

*We came because we wanted to see bread*

*- to see more miracles*

*- to see a wonder worker*

But some would acknowledge;

*We found something far greater, far better.*

*We found the bread of life*

*- real life*

*- we found God's gift of eternal life - we found Jesus - the Christ!*

### Unfolding truth

*We may be familiar with the children's party game with a fan-folded paper on which there is a picture of a well-known person*  
*- the object is to be the first to guess who the person is as the picture unfolds*

In a similar way that is how Jesus gradually unfolds the truth  
to these people who had made the effort to find him  
whatever their reasons

### **First Fold**

Jesus says to them - *I'll tell YOU why you came.*  
*You came because you saw the miracles yesterday*  
*- you came for more bread - more wonders - more religious effects.*  
*That is - you came to be physically and emotionally satisfied*

And to us he may equally say - *I want you to come, but be honest about why you have come*

- there are many ways by which we are made aware of our need of what he offers
  - emotion and material satisfaction may be among them
- There are many reasons why we look for him
- or find ourselves brought near to him

### **Second Fold**

*But there's more to life than that*  
*You need to be looking for 'living bread'*  
*- the food for eternal life*  
*You need the life which provides*

- un-fading satisfaction
  - comfort and peace when the physical and emotional glass is empty
  - strength when pain, sorrow and loss take away your appetite  
and leave you feeling you never can eat again
- gives you deep happiness when the pleasure moments give way  
to another boring day at work,  
to the screams of squabbling siblings,  
to the questions of how to meet the bills at end of the month and who's going to sit with granny .....
- gives you ability to cope  
when friends switch their allegiance  
and forget the many times you put yourself out for them
- gives you hope when suffering and death seem to laugh at life  
and you can't see much purpose in it all

This is the something more - something deeper to life - the life which is of the spirit

Jesus is saying to the Capernaum crowd and to us:  
*That's what is worth crossing the lake for.*  
*That's what is worth walking miles to discover*

### **Third Fold**

So, opening the third fold we discover-  
*Where to find the full, satisfying, eternal life of peace and hope and happiness.*

It is a gift from God, Jesus told them  
So, you don't have to  
find the right place  
be in the right mood  
earn the right number of points

It's of God's grace - I.e. because he loves you  
You don't have to work and study, sing the right songs, say the most prayers, do the right things ..

It is a gift to be taken NOW - and taking it makes you want to do all those *right* things

### **Fourth Fold**

So what do you do? - surely you have to do something?

And now Jesus is opening the truth even further

- with the turn of the fold - it is obvious that the truth is not a thing - a belief - a doctrine

**It is a PERSON**

*Believe the one whom God has sent - God himself, Saviour, Friend*

And faith itself is a gift from God

*God gives us His Eternal Life and then says 'Here is faith to open the gift.'*

So Jesus says: *just take it, and show your gratitude in your words and in life!*

### **Fifth Fold**

Now at last Jesus unfolds the whole truth for them

The person God gives - the one to believe in

**It's ME!**

*I am the bread of life!*

He is everything we need

The strength for our weakness

The comfort in our sorrow

The provider of our needs

The new beginning

The way of holiness

The hope for our future

The guide for our decisions .....

Why are you here?

*Because I want you Lord!*

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**Year B Ordinary 19**

Psalm 130

### **When the Bottom falls out**

*Psalm 130.1 From the depths of my despair I call to you, Lord.*

The psalms are full of basic human experiences

as well as being songs of praise and prayers to God

And this psalm [130] touches the moment of despair

which has been so aptly described as *when the bottom falls out of life*

- when there is no hope of a satisfactory outcome

- when you feel you have plunged into the depths of darkness and even the faint speck of light at the end of the dark tunnel has almost flickered out

- when you do not know which way to turn, or who to run to for help

- when you are hammering against an impenetrable wall

- when you reach out into emptiness and there is nothing there

- when you feel as though you are in a pit,

- the walls too steep to climb

- the uncertain floor sinking beneath you ...

*Out of the depth of my despair ...*

*When the bottom has fallen out of life*

### **A How-to Psalm**

The psalmist also gives us his way of dealing with it  
- his '**how to**' advice comes from his own experience

It is a word NOT about how to get out of the pit  
BUT - how to manage the pit experience

***until God brings us out***

Which assumes, that even though it may not seem like it at the time,  
God is down there with you - in the pit  
*Hear my cry, Lord*

the writer gives us the first of three steps  
for managing *the pit-stop called despair*

### **God IS**

First, realise that God IS  
And God is still there - with us

He realises his personal helplessness  
And then, at the same time, he remembers  
the greatness, the love, the power of God  
- who is no further away than his prayer

*I may be falling but that does not alter God,s love*  
He DOES listen  
He WILL help  
He IS willing to save his people

and in the light of that knowledge he *stands in awe of God*

Here is the first step in surviving the bottomless pit experience -  
Remember the fathomless depths and unreachable heights of God's love  
He is higher than the highest summit  
He is lower than the lowest deeps  
Stand in awe of him

### **Trust**

Which leads to the second step  
the handing over of everything to God  
*I trust his word*

The psalm which follows [131] could well be a comment on this word 'trust'  
It is a beautiful expression of what trusting God really means

*I have given up my pride  
I am no longer concerned with great matters or subjects too difficult for me  
I am content and at peace like a child lying quietly in its mother's arms ..  
My heart is quiet within me*

Letting go of self in the confidence of who God IS  
and trusting what we know of him by the testimony of scripture and fellow Christians

The whole scripture resonates with God's challenge, in the words of Jesus - '*trust me!*'

## Wait

There is one more step the psalmist takes ..  
The step of **DOING** faith

Waiting - which is the act of trusting and handing over  
*Often the hardest things when the matter is so desperate for us*  
It's hard to accept that God has his own timetable , but the way to peace and happiness,  
even through pain and hardship  
is to be running by God's clock

And there is a **way** of waiting  
In the psalmist's words - *I wait eagerly - expectantly*

He does that by  
Not just waiting FOR God                      **But waiting ON God**

Waiting ON - means  
life taken up with prayer and love for God  
- serving him in love for others  
That is - getting on with a life of praise in every part  
And leaving the rest to him

## Watching for the Dawn

The psalm ends with a wonderful picture of waiting ON our unchanging God

A picture of watching through the darkest hours which often precede the dawn  
- trusting that the day will come because God has promised  
and the sun has never failed to rise

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**Year B Ordinary 20**

John 6: 51 - 58

## Tasters or Label Readers

John 6.51 Jesus said, *'I am the living bread - come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever. The bread is my flesh which I give so that the world may live.'*

## Amazing Claims

It's amazing!  
*You know that feeling*  
*Overawed by a beautiful scene...*  
    *Sunlit water*  
    *Rainbow against a dark sky*  
*Faced with a scientific fact or achievement beyond our imagining*  
*A space probe taking us back millions of years!*  
*The millions of microbes in the palm of my hand*

*It's amazing!*

I have that same sense of wonder when I hear or read these words of Jesus  
They are fantastic!

*I am the living bread  
by which the world may really live!*

Jesus claims that he is the answer to the two greatest desires of all people in all ages

- **the desire to live for ever**
- **the desire to see the whole world at peace**

Satisfied in every way  
Living in harmony with its creator and his cosmos

**The first desire** is most apparent today in our demands for health systems which will keep us going as long as possible after our 'use by' date.

We want the best of life to go on forever!

And coupled with that the desire for an assurance that *there is more* beyond our physical life - - something more if only to make sense of the joys and the sufferings

**The other desire** is the longing for peace

Who would deny the aching in most people's hearts for a stable, satisfied world

- we feel it with every news bulletin

To all these longings, Jesus says

*I am the bread and drink*

- *the satisfaction and life you are looking and longing and working for!*

## **Food and Drink**

For us, Jesus' words about being the living bread are associated with the events of his Last Supper with his disciples  
The Communion

The act of communion and remembrance is understood variously by the churches.

Personally when I receive the bread and wine, I feel in the presence of a mystery greater than my mind can get round, so I simply eat and drink and say:

*Lord Jesus Christ, come in. Enter my life.*

*Take possession of me*

*I want all of your life - your Spirit in my life - in my being*

## **And it is so much bigger than that!**

*Paul, writing to Christians in Colossae, realizes how immense is Jesus' claim*

*- this sharing of the life of Jesus*

*Simply by believing and accepting him*

*It not only reconciles us to God*

*It brings the whole of life on line with him*

**And more** *it reconciles the whole cosmos*

*What happened on the cross and in Jesus' resurrection  
has changed the life of all God's creation*  
***It just waits for us to believe it, accept it, and live it.***

It IS that simple!

### **Greater Wonder**

However

While I wonder at these amazing claims of Jesus  
I would wonder more at what his church does with the claims  
I wonder that we can be so complacent about them

It was the same at the beginning  
Jesus makes his claims... and what happens?  
An argument begins about what he really means!  
i.e. theological and literalist discussions!  
and a number of people drift away!

At that point Jesus' response to them was  
- (and to us is)  
*You will not understand by argument*  
*You will understand ONLY by believing and accepting*  
***Like eating bread!***

Hunger is only satisfied by accepting, taking, eating  
We will never be satisfied while we hold the loaf of bread in our hands and debate  
the texture; the salt content; the number of added vitamins;  
or discuss the ability of our digestive system to assimilate the food  
***Just go on and eat it!***

However ... too often it is much easier to be a 'label Christian'  
*We live surrounded by informative labels on every tin, bottle, packet*  
*Many people spend lots of time reading them*  
*Often worrying about The E numbers; the additives; the fibre content;*  
*the calories; how much fat and sugar...*  
*Seemingly making every excuse to avoid actually eating the food ...*  
*enjoying it and letting it satisfy our need*

All that Jesus is saying is this:  
If you want to have my life -- the life of God in you  
- all my spirit - all my love  
To satisfy your deepest needs  
***And at the same time make you so dis- satisfied with the life about you that you  
want to help the whole world share his love***

Then, just take it  
It is as simple as eating a piece of bread

## Personal Conviction

I am convinced that the Good News of Jesus contains the two most important truths to which we must constantly return to which we must hold firm.

Two things which have inspired Christian leaders through the centuries

### First

I have eternal life through faith in Jesus, my Saviour God

### Second

The whole world may share this life and be transformed by it  
Which gives us hope  
**Everyone** may have this life of healing, peace and happiness.  
That means every single person I come into contact with every day!!

Jesus give us this conviction that our world **CAN** be a place of peace  
Where justice and truth prevail  
Where little children can live without fear  
Where hungry families can be satisfied  
Where the suffering find comfort

This is not a fanciful dream but a vision of divine reality  
Because Jesus died and rose again  
And gives himself to all who will take him  
- like eating a piece of bread -  
and let him be their source of spiritual nourishment  
and energy for their lives  
Take him - and live  
and watch the whole world come alive with God's love.

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Year B Ordinary 21

John 6. 56 - 69

## The Price of Bread

*John 6:60 Many of his followers said; 'This teaching is too hard'*

### Too hard or costs too much ?

How little changes with the passing of centuries !  
Jesus was at a synagogue worship time rather like our church service  
A fine service - great teaching - enthusiasm  
Then, afterwards - in the car, or was it donkey - park  
they started grumbling  
Can't understand what he's at ! This teaching is too hard !

But it wasn't too hard  
It was just that the price of bread was too high !  
What Jesus was asking - or giving - cost too much

### **Food for Life**

Jesus was making a simple statement to illustrate his central teaching  
He had come to give people real life - God's life in them  
like a whole new beginning - being born all over again  
filled with God's Spirit - God's love  
life in God's will - in God's hands - for ever!

He said that to receive this life is as easy as eating a piece of bread  
Take God into your life - discover the Spirit - the spiritual dimension to life -  
because you are hungry for love and life  
And because Jesus is God - take him - it's like eating him

Of course the literalists - found much to play around with which guaranteed  
that they and others missed the whole point of the illustration

It was, in some ways, difficult for them to grasp  
We have the advantage of looking back  
- of seeing the significance of events like the last supper  
- showing us the broken bread and poured out wine as symbolic of Jesus' death  
- of his resurrection - God with us - life that is eternal - and Pentecost - the Spirit of Jesus  
entering into everyone who believes  
*Just like bread being taken and eaten*

### **Same Problem**

But we still have the same difficulty that they had

#### ***It's too hard!***

- too hard to be a Christian
- too difficult to grasp the truth of God

too hard to get involved with activities for the Kingdom

and today the reasons are not dissimilar  
are still the same as shown here in this story

### **Material satisfaction takes priority**

People still find it hard to accept that spiritual peace is more than material satisfaction

It was the devil's first temptation card  
*- feed the world and you'll be a great success*  
to which Jesus replied - *man does not live on bread alone - but on every word that comes from the Father*

Even more today people look to a faith that will satisfy physical needs  
from the two extremes of:

- *let's see a faith that can feed hungry children - then we'll believe*  
to those who say *believe in God and you'll be prosperous*

Jesus taught that the way to a peaceful, satisfied world  
is FIRST a soul-satisfaction  
people right with God - at peace with him  
people filled with the Spirit of Jesus - living as Christ in his world  
Only then can we hope to overcome the greed, self which creates war, and hunger in a  
world of plenty

Too hard?

Kitty Muggeridge - speaking of the "Kingdom of God being within you" - tells of the many  
attempts at creating a social heaven on earth and their failure *'because they were attempts  
at providing a way of living a godly righteous and sober life without the cross of Christianity'*

### **Jesus and his divinity**

But there is another, deeper issue which is at the heart of finding the Way of Christ too hard  
That is not accepting that Jesus is divine - is God !

The people attending the synagogue were saying *He's good, but we know him. He's one of  
us. He's Joseph the carpenter's lad - we know Mary and family*

And Jesus was saying - ***I AM - God the Father and I are one***

The truth continues to be a stumbling block for some  
But if he is not divine - we have nothing to preach  
- his resurrection and ascension have no power  
- our experience of him in his Holy Spirit is imagination because

The final proof of his divinity is his resurrection and ascension  
- and our experience of him in his Holy Spirit

Martin Luther - *"Take hold of Jesus as a man and you will discover he is God"*  
Take hold of Jesus as God and discover the wonder of his humanity and the power of his  
Gospel

### **The Price of Bread**

The real issue is that the *bread of life* costs too much

To accept that material satisfaction is far less important than spiritual  
To accept that Jesus is Lord, God, Saviour, Judge ....  
means letting go - or at least holding very lightly to material things and thought

Accepting Jesus as divine  
involves - as he taught - a dying to self - in order to come alive with his life  
involves a personal resurrection  
being prepared to die to everything precious to me  
my mental arrogance and pride in achievement  
learning to live on my knees before the splendour of his majesty  
Living with Jesus  
who is greater than I am  
in loving, in wisdom, in his whole being  
co-creator of the universe - God incarnate

## **The real price**

but is that too much to pay ?

NOT when I consider the real price of the bread of life

The Cross is the price he paid for our eternal life  
the bread by which the world can have the life of his kingdom  
The whole world waits to share that life  
through us and our witness

Is it too much to ask that we pay the price of bread  
in dying to ourselves  
and trusting all our life to him  
to be used for his kingdom and his glory

It is as simple as taking and eating a piece of bread

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**Year B Ordinary 22**

James 1: 17-27

### ***God has no shadow***

James 1:17 God... who does not change or cause darkness by turning

## **I believe in God**

The Creeds - begin "I believe in God"

I believe in God - revealed in Jesus Christ - my Saviour and my Lord !  
To say that with pride and really believe it and live by it, is life-transforming  
- it changes everything !

That was how James saw it

He is writing to Christians who had suffered in Jerusalem  
and as a result of persecutions had been scattered  
all over Judaea and Samaria and into Asia  
- with the loss of home, family, possessions, livelihood ....

His purpose is to encourage them  
- *hold on to what you know of God*  
- *don't question God - don't blame God*  
- *start with what you know - and trust him*  
**say - I believe !**

like the psalmist - full of questions keeping him awake at night  
- *but I will still trust him - he is my Lord and my God [Psalm 77]*

## **God whom you know**

James reminds his readers and hearers  
Hang on to what you know and..  
What you know is:

### **God is good**

Firstly - What you know is: God is Good  
- all goodness has its origin in him  
every good gift - material and spiritual (of the  
Spirit) come from him - they are his to give

every good gift is proof of his great love for you  
*think of all the good things you have received - they say - 'God loves you'*

*Matthew 7 How much more will the father give good gifts to his children  
(Luke - give the holy Spirit - to those who ask)*

### **God is the creator**

What you know is : God is creator...  
Lord of all life  
In control of his world and everything in it  
- its people  
- its history

He made the lights of heaven  
- look up at the skies  
( *like the psalmist (8) - look at God's creation* )  
in wonder praise him  
realise his greatness and his power

### **God is saviour**

And more than that  
What you know is: God is Saviour...  
By his own will - his choice - he proved his love  
he brought us into being  
through his word of truth  
and gave us first place among his creatures

In Christ he has given us a new life  
he has proved it in the power of his word to  
change us  
He has given us the privilege of being the  
first-born among many believers

We ARE his glory

### **God is Unchanging**

*Hold on to those things says James*  
**and hold on to one more important truth**  
***In all this - God is eternal - he never changes***

He is Good, Creator and Lord, Saviour  
and he will still be the same tomorrow and for ever

James' letter shows obvious interest in the  
natural world - his illustrations are from the everyday

James had watched shadows and he claims  
*God makes no shadows*  
- only changing moods and circumstances create shadows  
*God doesn't change*

"His love is eternal" is the Psalmist's constant refrain

and those who walk with God - walk in light - may have no shadows

*Mother Julian of Norwich in her amazingly contemporary Revelations of Divine Love gives this same message - GOD IS LOVE - eternal - unchanging. She explored the fact of suffering - her own and others - in the light of this unchanging Lord who is all love.*

He is the only place to start

### **In the light of God**

John encourages us to walk in the light of God

*1 John 1.7 If we live in the light - just as he is in the light  
- then we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus,  
his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

Shadows are made by our movements, not his  
Life-shadows may be the result of standing / living at the wrong angle to God

If we live in the direct light of God  
of his love  
there are no shadows  
We make the shadows  
Walk with God and everything comes into his light of truth and love  
*when the sun is overhead there can be no shadows*