

What (or Who) Nourishes You?

Gathering

You might like to find a quiet space and light a candle.

Today's service at Kiama includes sharing in Communion. If you are in a stay-at-home area, or unable to share with us for any reason, and you would like to share in a time of Communion, please contact Kath. We can organise to share in-person or by Zoom.



Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, [God the Creator],
breathed life into this Land and her Peoples.

From time beyond our reckoning the Wodi Wodi

people of the Dharawal nation have blessed this place through their care and concern.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders, past and present, and we pray for the future of their communities.

May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.

(c) 2017, A.Koh-Butler, This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.

Call to Worship

Jesus said:

I am the bread of life (John 6:35,41,48,51)

I am the light of the world (John 8:12, 9:5)

I am the door (John 10:7,9)

I am the good shepherd (John 10:11,14)

I am the resurrection and the life (John 11,25)

I am the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6)

I am the true vine (John 15:1,5)

I am (John 18:5)

Let us pray...

Gather us, O God,

around this table, where we remember Jesus, your son, "I am"...

Gather us, O God,

mindful of those around us in this place

and our friends and loved ones who are not here - whether lost to this world, or locked in at home.

Gather us, O God, Life-Giver, Truth-bearer, Nurturing One.

In our gathering, may we encounter your love and sustaining grace,

may we be refreshed and renewed to serve you, sharing your love in the world. Amen.

Listen - Table of Plenty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_t8O_PwPIKA

Prayer

Let us pray...

Creator of all that is,
we give thanks for this new day,
for the beauty of the environment in which we live,
for the safety we enjoy in this community,
for the friendships and support we share with friends and neighbours.

Eternal God, you surround us with your presence,
you enfold us in your love,
you embrace us with grace.

When we are hungry or thirsty, you fill us.

You satisfy even our deepest longings.

You place before us a vision, a dream, a way of being in the world that ensures that everyone and every creature has a place and is nurtured, valued and cared for.

And yet, we so often turn aside for the lure of a quick fix, an easy road, the stroke of our ego.

Forgive us when we settle for something less than -

less than justice

less than reconciliation for all peoples

less than wholeness

less than radical, inclusive, boundless love.

God, you come to us in Christ, offering nourishment for life.

Help us to be still long enough to eat our fill, to drink deeply of the sustaining life you offer. And as we are nourished, send us into your world to nourish and sustain others.

And so we pray for our world...

Prayers of the People

Holy One, it seems we have been waiting for a very long time.

We wait for this pandemic to ease, only to be confronted by yet another wave and we feel a deep soul weariness as we struggle to adapt to it all.

Yet you remind us of the overarching story that swaddles us in comfort and hope. You call to us in our despair and whisper to us that we are loved and cherished. Then you pull us out of ourselves so that we can become your loving and graceful presence even in this chaotic world – especially in this chaotic world.

As we breathe in your peace that settles in our bones, we become aware of the world around us.

There is much hurt, much anger, much confusion, and we feel powerless to address it all.

This gift of prayer opens a door of hope, an awareness of the people in our lives who are hungry for healing and wholeness, of the restlessness of our own hearts, of who you are and who we are called to be.

We think of the people we know and love who are unwell, or living with illness or injury;

we think of friends grieving the death of people we love;

we think of people who care for others - in our health system, in our communities, and those who care for loved ones at home;

we think of people who struggle for justice.

In the silence we open our hearts, we lift our prayers to you.....

When we are overwhelmed, feeling that this is an impossible task, that our emotions are too raw, help us to wait in a sacred pause, trusting in your faithfulness.

Sing to us in our hearts of the bread that gives life to us all.

Renewed by your love, grant us courage, wisdom, and grace to live in this time, knowing that we are never alone.
Amen.

Melodie Long (based John 6: 41-51 and Psalm 130)
<https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/08/03/worship-words-for-8-august/>

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: John 6:35-51

³⁵ Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.'

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' ⁴²They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' ⁴³Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Let us pray,
Nourish us, Bread of Life,
fill our longing, feed our hope, sustain our faith. Amen.

Sometimes, at this time of the year, the Bible readings for worship can feel a bit random. Right in the middle of the year we are supposed to be focusing on Mark's gospel, we find ourselves spending 5 weeks in the gospel attributed to John - actually, it is 5 weeks focusing on one chapter of John, chapter 6. Even the most committed of Johannine fans might say that it is a bit of over-kill.

So, over the past few weeks, we have been flitting between the readings from John and our following of the story of King David in the Hebrew Scriptures, with a little bit of Ephesians thrown in for good measure.

So while I think 5 weeks on John 6 is a bit more than we need, I do think it is worth us pausing here today because I think it draws us into a deep mystery and truth that is central to who we are as the Body of Christ.

And for us, right now, still in the depths of winter, holding out for the promise of spring, in the midst of the uncertainty of a pandemic that continues to take lives and to cause devastating illness; a pandemic that has meant hardship and unemployment for many, and separation from

the people we love; in a week where Lifeline has twice beat its record for the most calls taken in a day; let's stop and ask ourselves:
what nourishes you?

Food is essential to life - even in a pandemic, obtaining food is one of the reasons we are allowed to leave our homes. And every culture has something that is regarded as a staple. For us, and for many cultures, it is bread - something made by mixing ground seed (flour) with water or other liquid and either baked in an oven or cooked in a pan over a fire.

Across the world, there are hundreds of varieties - sweet, savoury, yeasted, flat, soft, crisp, dense, light, different shapes...

So when Jesus uses the image of bread, he is referring to something very familiar, something encountered everyday. And when he says that he is the Bread of Life, Jesus is telling us that he is our nourishment for our every day. So it is not *what* nourishes us, but *who*?

But what does Jesus mean?

There are layers of meaning held in John 6 - let's see if we can't uncover just a few...

John's gospel is written much later than the other gospels - probably about 70 years later - long enough for the early Christian community to have had time to reflect on Jesus' life and what his resurrection meant for them, and long enough to realise that his return wasn't going to be as soon as they had hoped for. So throughout the gospel, there is much more reflection on who Jesus is, and what his post-resurrection life means.

John 6 begins with Jesus feeding the crowd. Jesus gives them bread.

Note: in John's account of this story, it is Jesus who gives the bread (John 6:11), not the disciples (cf Mark 6:41). Physical bread for physical hunger and nutrition.

Then Jesus makes the connection between himself and the manna that was given to the people of Israel when they were in the desert after escaping from slavery in Egypt (6:32). So the sign or symbol is expanded from a "one-off" picnic to the nourishment of the people of Israel, every day for 40 years, nourishment that the Hebrew people believed was from God.

And then Jesus extends further, "I am the Bread of Life" (6:35).

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Whoever...

From a one-off picnic, to a daily provision over 40 years, to "whoever"...

The statement is emphatic, "I am...", or "I, myself, am..."

Jesus is both the giver of bread and the embodiment, the personification of bread, the sustenance of life.

"I am..." echoes the God who met Moses in the burning bush.

Which is why the people in the crowd are offended - they know Jesus is the son of Joseph and Mary, so how dare he make a claim that puts himself in the same league as the God who rescued them from Egypt.

Here, also, Jesus is once more extending the provision of life beyond the people of Israel, beyond the Jews - *whoever* comes has eternal life, *whoever* eats will live (6:47, 51).

Life - now - not some distance heaven in the sky - Life - now. The language Jesus uses throughout this passage make it clear he is not talking about some time in the future, he is talking about the here and now.

This bread, this life, it is God's gift, "drawn by the Father" (6:44) - not in any kind of selective way, but *whoever* comes.

And this life, is the life embodied by Jesus - a life that loves unconditionally, that restores hope, that heals broken hearts, that returns people to their family and community, that hungers and

thirsts for justice and peace, that reaches out to a stranger or a person doing it tough, that challenges the misuse and abuse of power, that lives in harmony with all of creation.

How often do we settle for something less, something that cannot sustain us?

How often do we find ourselves with a hole deep within, longing, yearning for that hole to be filled?

And so we try to fill it - keeping ourselves busy, trying a new hobby or filling our time with Netflix or social media or the next best tech gadget - carefully keeping away from the thing, the One, we know will satisfy because we have convinced ourselves it is too hard or not cool or just inconvenient - and the emptiness grows...

As followers of Jesus, this table calls us back again and again to remind us of the One who can satisfy and sustain us.

We gather together, remembering that we never have to do this alone.

We gather together and remember together that the Jesus way, is the way of life.

We gather together and remember that even though we are broken and bruised, we are drawn into Jesus' life, Jesus' words, Jesus' love, and there we find ourselves sustained, loved and made whole.

So as we are drawn to this table once more, as we gather together, as we remember our friends and brothers and sisters in Christ who are not able to join us here today, may you know the sustaining love and grace of Jesus enfolding you, holding you, and sending you into your every day.

Sending out

Listen - We Belong To You

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5n6W1Q-ZeLc>

Sending

Go now, you have been fed,
you have shared the living bread;
you have been grafted to the vine,
you have tasted heaven's new wine.

Go now, you have been blessed.
God draws you here, God draws you near.
God knows your name and says you are wanted
and in your lives, the seed of God's realm is planted.

Go now, and go in Christ's own peace
and in your going do not cease
to love yourself - you are God's treasure,
and love the world - it is God's pleasure,
and love the Living God in greatest measure.

Based on... Wild Goose Worship Group, A Wee Worship Book, 5th ed., pp92-3

Blessing

May you be blessed with the imagination of God, the Creator of Life;
May you be blessed with the love of Christ, the Bread of Life;
May you be blessed with the energy of the Holy Spirit, the Breath of Life;
now and always. Amen.

Rev Kath Merrifield
8 August 2021