

August 9<sup>th</sup> 2009 HTB 10.30

1 Kings 19:4-8

JOHN 6: 35, 41-51 – I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

Already in chapter 6 of John we have heard how Jesus fed a vast crowd of people with the minimum amount of food. 5 loaves and 2 fishes miraculously fed a crowd of 5000. Following this Jesus went off into the surrounding hills and his disciples went by boat to the other side of the lake. Having once been fed, the crowds then go in search of Jesus, hungry for more of what he could offer them. Not only food but also more of the miracles of healing that he had performed and which they had witnessed. (v2) It seems to be the miracles that draw them and which arouse their interest. They reckon that if Jesus wants them to take him seriously, listen to what he has to say and trust him, he must continue to perform more of these miracles. Give them some kind of sign to validate his ministry in their eyes. They looked back to the past and remembered how in the time of Moses they had received manna on a daily basis for food. We heard in our OT reading this morning, how Elijah had had his needs met in the desert. This ability to perform miracles makes the crowds sit up and take notice. However they are mainly interested in what Jesus can do for them on a material plane and how they benefit from the miracles as they are look for more of the same. We would call it cupboard love. Rather like my cat who loves me dearly whenever I am in the vicinity of the fridge!

The crowds are prepared to place their trust in Jesus because of this ability of his to produce miracles. But what permanent value do they have? For those who have been released from sickness, their life has undoubtedly changed. For those fed with fish and bread, their hunger is momentarily satisfied. But on a spiritual level nothing has altered. Jesus is eager to show the crowds the way to real life and how to hang onto it. How they can turn from just existing, to living life in a different way, experience it in all its fullness. He wants people to accept him not simply for what he can give them materially, but for what he might be to them. Here, he is of course entering into the realm of relationships. He is talking about the way the yearnings of the human heart can be met and permanent satisfaction be found.

Almost at once Jesus comes up against opposition. A lot of those in the crowd were local people who knew Jesus' family and background – or thought they did! As long as Jesus went around doing good, not expecting anything from them, the crowds were prepared to follow him. Their part of the bargain seems very one-sided. But once he began to claim to have come down from heaven, that was a different matter and the opposition made itself heard. The crowds were judging by externals, thinking they were wise in their own wisdom. Does that sound familiar?! Despite the fact that the people were waiting for God's chosen one, they had their own ideas about what he would be like when he came. Now that he is there in front of them, they don't recognise him. They are unaware they are running the risk of missing out on real life in this world and the next.

How must Jesus have been feeling at this stage? As he looks at the crowds flocking to him, he must have been acutely conscious of their needs. But also conscious that they were looking in the wrong direction to satisfy those needs. They are allowing the

miracles to distract them from the person performing them. The pain, hurt, the longing for wholeness, a sense of emptiness waiting to be filled. The desire to belong, to have someone on their side during the trials of everyday life. These and more, would be the emotions portrayed in the crowd. We ourselves know those feelings because we too have experienced them. Jesus would know how they were feeling and the longings of their hearts, as he does ours. He knew that neither for the crowds nor for us, were the miracles the answer. It was Augustine of Hippo who said our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God, and there standing before them was God himself; Jesus, sent and commissioned to make his Father known to his people.

Jesus addresses their incredulity over his origins by repeating that he has been sent by God and is from God, to validate his claim to have come down from heaven. But the crowds' GPS system is taking them down the wrong path, they have programmed it incorrectly and they will end up in a dead-end road. Jesus is asking them to turn around, re-programme their GPS and to open themselves up to listen and learn from God's word. God's word is there in the OT scriptures, as it is in Jesus' teachings, the external aspect of God's word. They hear it in the Synagogue in the same way we hear it in our church services. As they hear, listen and learn, they become obedient to God's will revealed in the written word, and are drawn to Jesus, who is the Living Word. This is why it is important to persevere in reading the bible, that we may be drawn ever closer to the Father and the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. God speaks of this in Jeremiah, "I will put my law in their minds and write it in their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people." As the external becomes an internal reality, the promise of Jesus to raise them up at the last day, comes into effect. This is salvation working in the person's heart as their life is characterized by their belief that Jesus is the Chosen One sent by God.. Not because of his miracles, but because of the new relationship they have with him. They will have gone beyond the need for miracles to convince them because they now know him on a personal level.

Jesus reminds the crowds of the time when they ate manna in the desert, and points out that it didn't prevent them from dying. He contrasts that bread with the superior bread he now offers which conquers death and leads to eternal life. He again identifies himself as being this same life-giving bread – bread that will never go mouldy and rot, and which has no 'sell-by' date. He sees forward to the time of his death, the means by which he will give life to all who believe and trust in him and we realise how costly this bread is. We have a choice, as the crowds did. We can hanker after signs and be amazed by them, but never allow them to move us on into a living relationship with the person responsible for those signs. Or we can look beyond them, accept Jesus' own testimony about himself and his origins and trust him with ourselves, letting him in to all areas of our lives, so there are no longer any "no-go" areas for him. Our priorities change. We change, as we find ourselves fed through this new relationship with the bread that is Christ himself.

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