

Trinity 9 (Proper 13)

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey on Sunday 1 August 2021

Readings: Ephesians 4 vv 1-16 and John 6 vv 24-35

I love bread – especially the smell of freshly baked bread, as it greeted me this morning, and the taste of fresh bread. Humble elements are transformed: flour, water, salt, yeast, maybe some egg to glaze the crust. There are tangible and immediate connections with basic processes of life: the sun ripening grain, earth and rain feeding growth, human labour and creativity transforming raw materials into life-sustaining nourishment.

Attention to the ingredients connects us to a web of work and workers whose skill and efforts make this food possible. As bread links us across the generations, we may even catch a glimpse of generations past whose ingenuity laid the foundation for the bread before us.

We could go all the way back to ancient times, but we don't have to do this to show the preciousness and perseverance of people dependent upon bread for their daily sustenance. The first European settlers in the America packed their trunks with wheat seeds when they journeyed across the Atlantic Ocean. They knew that with even a bit of bread, they could be nourished. They knew they could sustain life – planting, tending, harvesting, milling, mixing, kneading, waiting, shaping, baking, taking, giving thanks, breaking, sharing.

We meet Jesus in today's gospel just after he has fed the multitudes, after everyone has had their fill of bread. They have had the pleasure of eating enough. We know that the people left the meal Jesus set for them feeling satisfied, because (according to the Gospel account) there are even leftovers.

They ate until they were satisfied. They had enough.

There's a funny thing about 'enough'. Just what is 'enough'?

The people Jesus had fed wanted a guarantee that they would always have enough. Jesus' provision of plentiful bread seemed to them something they wanted more of. So they pursued him. They thought if they could have him, they could have bread – limitless, wonderful, unending bread. Enough.

Jesus fed hungry people. He knew people need to eat. He told his followers to feed people, real, physical, tangible, nutritious food. But he also promised that he himself would be enough.

He didn't want to be just a provider of physical bread. He wants to be our bread – our sustenance, our nourishment, our daily strength, our source of satisfaction.

Jesus is bread, but he wants to fill the hunger of our hearts and not just our stomachs. He wants to fill that gnawing, aching emptiness that we try to fill with lesser things. We may be tempted to use distractions of all sorts to satisfy our sense of longing or relieve the boredom, to put an end to fretting and worrying about having enough of what we think that we need, rather than allowing ourselves to accept the embrace of the one for whom we were made.

Jesus is daily sustenance. He is bread to be savoured, gathered around. Bread to inspire thanksgiving, to remind us of the wonder of life, to strengthen us. We can contemplate him thoughtfully, chewing slowly, pondering. But we will gain more if we come to him

recognizing our hunger and our need, open to whatever he places in our outstretched hands.

Bread is taken, blessed, and broken, as it will be in this Eucharist today. Bread is to be shared. And so, as Jesus is broken on the cross, he gives his life which is to be shared. This sharing of his life invites us to exercise the creativity of an artisan bread-baker and the compassion of a parent ensuring that his or her children will always have food, even if the parents have to go hungry.

Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.'