

## **Trinity 11 (Proper 14, year B)**

*A sermon preached at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey on Sunday 12 August 2018  
by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker*

*Readings: Ephesians 4 verse 25 – 5 verse 2 and John 6 verses 35 and 41-51*

'I am the bread of life' is the first of the seven 'I am' sayings of Jesus which St John records. These 'I am' sayings make fundamental claims about Jesus' relationship with God. They are as important in St John's gospel as the account of the Last Supper and the institution of Holy Communion is in the other three gospels. So these 'I am' sayings bring into a sharp focus the implications to us of accepting, or rejecting, his message. As the bread of life, Jesus is the one who nourishes us, the one on whom we are to depend for everlasting life. 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever.'

Notice what Jesus says about this offer of God's love and his feeding which has such a transforming effect. On the one hand, the offer is made to those whom God chooses: 'No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me.' On the other hand, this is balanced by stress on our responsibility to come to God through Jesus: 'Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

We can grumble like the Jews in the Gospel, or we can accept what God offers – even if it is not quite what we were expecting.

There is a balance between God's invitation and our response. God generously and lovingly invites us to his feast, but he never forces himself on us, especially when we are at our most vulnerable. God is there in our vulnerability, but he does not force himself on us. The response must come from us, out of the free will which God has given us. But through his Holy Spirit, God teaches us and gives us more insight so that our will and his come more into balance – so that what God wants for us and our response work more and more in harmony.

'There is nothing new under the sun'. So writes the teacher in the Old Testament book, Ecclesiastes – 'What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.' At one level, this is absurd. Every Olympic Games sees athletic achievement to new heights. Space exploration continues in ways we could scarcely dream of just a few years ago – for example the successful launch this morning of a probe that will investigate the Sun. Medical advances offer the possibility of cure where previously there was none. And so on.

But whatever the advances, it is an unavoidable conclusion that human nature and experience in 2018 is not so very different to human nature as Jesus saw it and the human nature which St Paul found in the young churches to whom he wrote his letters. 'Putting away all falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours.' 'Do not let the sun go down on your anger.' 'Let no evil talk come out of your mouths.' 'Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.'

The fascinating thing about this list is that these are everyday experiences, which most of us know well and which we find to a greater or lesser extent in every community, including every Christian community.

And yes, of course there have been time when I have had to plead guilty as charged in the light of St Paul's admonitions. Why have I not learned? Why, for example, without any evidence except my own prejudice, have I thought the worst of others and made assumptions about their motives? You may be able to sympathise with me, from your own experience.

If we ever dare to think that Jesus doesn't understand human nature, remember the parable about the man who is released by his master from a huge debt, only to put a fellow servant in prison for a debt that is trivial in comparison to the debt from which he has himself been released. When his master learns about his behaviour, his response leaves the servant in no doubt about the folly of his actions: 'Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you'. And just in case we haven't got the point, Jesus says, 'So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.'

Unity and love must be real, not just in principle, not just in our overall priorities, but in the detail of our daily relationships.

We can grumble like the Jews in the Gospel, or we can accept what God offers – even if it is not quite what we were expecting. And what God offers to us, freely and generously (not because we deserve it but because he loves us – and not just because he loves us as we are, but because he loves us too much to leave us like that) is his own Son, who says to you and to me, 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever.'