

Sermon 5 August 2018

Ephesians 4:1-16 John 6:24-35

On Thursday I had lunch with some old colleagues and the conversation got onto choice, onto the overwhelming choices and decisions that need to be made when redecorating a bathroom. How there is a bewildering array of tiles and how hard it is to be sure that they will be the right shape and size for wonky walls and odd angled rooms.

Well, I sometimes think that everyone I meet, including myself, is a bit of wonky person with odd angles. We are all unique. And yet, unlike bathroom tiles, which might not affix to a wonky wall, Jesus will stick with us through thick and thin.

Jesus says 'I AM' when he is asked to give people the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I AM the bread of life, he says, whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. This is one of six I AM statements recorded in John's gospel: I AM: the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate for the sheep; the good shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth and the life and the true vine. Light, nourishment, refreshment and protection, the basic things of life – but more than that, it is food for the soul and food such that we never get hungry, it is filling and nourishing.

And I AM, is so much more than saying – well, you see I'm Jesus. He is saying I am the Messiah, the saviour. I AM is the early Old Testament word for God. Moses asks God, when the Israelites ask me who has sent me, what shall I say, what is his name? God replies I AM who I AM: this is my name for ever and this is my title for all generations. Jesus is claiming that title now for himself.

But of course, Jesus is also fully human as well as divine, and as a human understands our very human needs and concerns. He understands why we each feel wonky at times and why we have such odd angles.

And what Jesus wants from us is to recognise that he is the bread of life, that he is the one who had come down from heaven to feed us. Paul, in the letter to the Ephesians sets out three things for us to aim for – to live up to the calling we have received; to do so with grace and humility and to make every effort to maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I don't know about you, but when I read the passage first, I skipped over the first bit – to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called and raced ahead to the bits about how we live together. The calling isn't the personal call or vocation that each of us has – to be a Christian parent, lawyer, teacher, doctor or run a business. It's the more basic call, to believe in Jesus as the risen Lord and to give him complete and undivided allegiance for the rest of our days.

So, Jesus wants to build a relationship with us. Something we can do as we read our Bible, pray, learn from other Christians and as we apply what we learn to our specific personal calling. The relationship we can have with Jesus is a dependable one. Probably the most dependable relationship we will ever have. I said a few sermons ago that Jesus does not let go of us. He did not run away in the garden of Gethsemane and he does not run away now. And of course we in our turn learn to be dependable people. With Jesus' model and the help of the Holy Spirit we can be there for the wonky people who feel abandoned, for those who don't know who and where they are. As wonky people, there will be times when we too feel that we need others to depend upon. Those who are lost, or have lost their way, those who suffer, those who are marginal, we can show what it is to have faith in the one who doesn't let go. You can show that to me. We don't have to have an absolutely perfectly worked out story or a non-wonky history. All we need is our own story of confusion,

uncertainty and growth, for Jesus has patience with us that we will grow, will grow up as Christians if we want to. Paul asks that of us, that we desire to grow up and to continue growing all our days. Not to get stuck. That we continue to ask, as those who came to Jesus asked: 'Sir, give us this bread always'.

One part of that request is met by the Communion part of the service. In this service we ask the Holy Spirit to change us. I love the way that we all receive together, that each person who comes is a person whose company is desired by God. We come as Jesus' guests, to receive a gift from Jesus, in the words of Rowan Williams, not as a reward for doing well, but because we are doing badly; not because we have arrived, but because we are travelling; not because we are right, but because we are confused and wrong; not because we are divine but because we are human and not because we are full but because we are hungry. We come to celebrate the eternal gift – Jesus, the I AM the bread – and to give thanks. And to honour the dependable relationship.

But that's only part of it. If we are to give Jesus complete and undivided allegiance I suggest there has to be more than a once a week or so, gift of bread and wine. We have a choice, to leave it at that, or be open to find the context where we will grow as God means us to, for we are all in need. To open ourselves up to the possibility of joy, of love, of a dependable relationship with Jesus.

We pray in the Lord's prayer for God to give us daily bread. This can be seen as asking God to sustain us, not just with physical food, but with the spiritual nourishment we need – to give us relationships with others that will nourish and enhance us. For interestingly, we ask that we be fed – not that we cultivate everything for ourselves and be self sufficient. We cannot generate this relationship on our own, for we are too wonky, have too many odd angles.

God is for everyone, not set apart for those who are ordained, who have special theological training, for those who are educated. God isn't for those who are good enough. God is for you and me, whatever our personal calling. If you are here this morning, thinking my life is so mundane, it's not turning out the way I thought it would, it seems to have so little value; then hear this: God can turn your humble contribution into something beautiful and fruitful beyond your imagination, if your service comes with grace and simplicity of heart. There is a place for each of us with God and just as I said that I love the way we all receive communion together because it shows how each person who comes is a person whose company is desired by God, so we can each be part of leading each other closer to Jesus.

Valerie Peters once shared a prayer with a Lent Group I was in. I think it complements our readings today. In the context of a communion service and remembering that we each want Jesus to give us bread that nourishes and fulfils us every day, let us pray:

Lord, help me to live this day quietly, easily. To lean on thy great strength trustfully, restfully. To wait for the unfolding of thy will patiently, serenely. To meet others, peacefully, joyfully. To face tomorrow confidently, courageously.

Amen

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