

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

15th August 2021 – Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

JOHN 6:51-58

BREAD OF LIFE

As far as we can tell from artefacts, cave paintings, ruins, and other archaeological finds we have discovered, right from the beginning of the history we as human beings have been so confronted by our mortality that we have sought ways to live forever. This isn't about the afterlife, whether it is our Christian belief in heaven, reincarnation, the Vikings in Valhalla, but about people being able to live forever in this life on this earth. I learnt this week that gunpowder was originally invented by the Chinese to be the basis of an elixir which would be drunk to give you eternal life. In some cultures, special mushrooms and other hallucinogens were taken in various ways to give immortality – and, while they may have given the person a feeling of immortality, obviously they didn't work. Some cultures believed that somehow drinking or eating metals would allow one to live forever, with the thought that because metals are seemingly indestructible the person who had metals inside of them would be also. This search for immortality even makes its way into stories and films in our times, like when Indiana Jones searched for the Holy Grail, the cup Jesus supposedly used at the Last Supper, because drinking from that cup has long been believed to give you immortality.

The reasons why we have always sought to overcome our mortality are varied and deep, and many philosophical teachings over time have been about them. At the base of them is perhaps the fact that we recognise that our life here on earth is for a set time, and we want to make the most of that life while we can.

And it may even go beyond that, with the search for immortality giving us an anchor, something we can hold on to, something we can hope in. Throughout history, people have needed this anchor, this source of stability. Our lives as human beings have always involved the ups and downs of relationships, the struggles of caring for ourselves and others, the good and the bad of

our health. And on the wider level, living in this life people have always had to deal with droughts and disasters, famine, war and conflict, and pandemics. We here now, in the 21st century living in a country of wealth, technology and knowledge, with a stable democratic system of government, and a good health and policing system, we now find ourselves struggling to deal with a disease that is hard to get on top of. For many of us, living in this country at this time, this is a situation we never thought we would be in. It's a time when some people lament that they feel they are drifting, that there is no hope, that they feel that everything they have trusted in up until now doesn't give them the security and stability it always has.

In our reading here today, Jesus says, 'I am that bread from heaven! Everyone who eats it will live forever. My flesh is the life-giving bread that I give to the people of this world' (v.51), and 'My flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink. If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you are one with me, and I am one with you' (v. 55-56). There are many places that we can look to for our hope and security in life. Some of them are good and are given to us by God to be enjoyed. Some are good and we sometimes use them in a way which is good for us and others, and brings glory to God, but then at other times we use them in a way which harms others and ourselves. And then there are the things which promise hope and peace, and their own version of 'immortality', but their promises are just as empty, and as harmful, as those of the snake in the tree who offered an apple as the source of immortality all those years ago.

Jesus promises Himself, He freely offers Himself, as the source of the hope, the peace, the meaning of life, of everything we are looking for in our lives. No doubt the people in the crowd that day when He first said these words would have been taken aback by His invitation to come and eat His flesh and drink His blood, just like people today would be shocked if we were to just give them these words like this. But what Jesus is doing here is declaring Himself to be the source of true life as the One who has been sent by God Himself. He is saying that He is the One who is with us in everything that we go through. The One who gives us forgiveness for all the times we sin against God and do things which harm others. The One in whom we can find the hope we

seek. The One who gives us the purpose in our lives. the One who gives us life in the face of our mortality. And He does these things not by having us drink or eat metals, or by drinking from a legendary cup, but simply by taking Him in. And to do that, we don't have to earn it, or search for it, it is there for us already.

Have a look at those words of Jesus here. What do they mean for us? In the first place to 'eat' Him as the Bread of Life is to have faith in Him, to know Him, to trust Him. It is to enjoy the good things God has given us in our lives, but ultimately to look to Jesus as the One in whom we find our true hope, forgiveness, and peace. The words 'eat' and 'drink' make us think of taking Jesus inside ourselves, and we do that when we deliberately and intentionally make time for God and His Word in our lives; reading, listening, reflecting, applying it to ourselves. We also eat and drink in this way when we come to worship with other Christians. We eat and drink in the way Jesus talks about here when we take Jesus into ourselves by looking to Him, having faith in Him, trusting in Him. Knowing and believing that He is the One who gives us that life which as humans we have always sought.

For us there is here also such an obvious reference here to what we do whenever we celebrate Holy Communion. This isn't only what is meant by eating and drinking Jesus' flesh and blood, but when we celebrate this meal together we are doing what Jesus says here in a way that we can really see, touch, and taste. This meal we have been given allows us to go past seeing what Jesus says as just being 'out there', to something we can know and experience right now 'in here'. The language Jesus uses here can be seen as the language of sacrifice, and when He died for us on the cross He made the ultimate and final sacrifice to forgive our sins, to overcome our mortality, to give us lives of purpose and hope in Him. And knowing that at times we would, as we do, struggle with the realness of this, on the night before He died Jesus gave us this meal to seal that promise for us, and to give us the absolute assurance that everything we seek for our lives we can now find in Him.

The search to overcome our mortality has always been there; living in the world we live in and going through the things we go through that's no surprise. In Jesus, in His life, His words, His death, God freely gives us all we need to both live in and face this life now. Our lives here still have a time on them, but through Jesus we are assured that not only do we live them in His hope and peace, but that through His dying and rising again we have new and eternal life also. Hear Jesus' invitation to take Him in as you both hear His Words, know His love and forgiveness, and have a relationship with Him. Know Him. Have faith in Him. Look to Him for all you need. Trust Him. Come to the meal He has given us, where in a real and physical way we eat His body and drink His blood, and are assured of all the promises He gives to us. In your lives, each day, eat the true Bread of Life. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

Eating the Life-Giving Bread Each Day

In this Bible reading Jesus calls us to eat Him as the Bread of Life, and tells us that when we eat His flesh and drink His blood we will live forever.

- What does it mean to you to do what Jesus is saying here, ie, how can we take Him into us each day?
- What are blessings that you receive in your life when you have the kind of relationship with Jesus which He is talking about here?

If You Eat My Flesh and Drink My Blood

We can make such a strong connection between what Jesus is saying here and our own understanding of Holy Communion; the meal in which we do take into ourselves the body and blood of Jesus.

- Reflect on or share: What does Holy Communion mean to you? How do you feel whenever you come forward to receive it?
- What blessings do you receive from receiving Holy Communion? How does it help/strengthen you in living your life?
- Thank God for the blessings He gives you in this special meal. Pray that He will lead you to find hope and peace as you remain with Him.

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