

Bennochy church 5th August 2018

How long can someone go without eating? Ask the person next to you. One internet article says this, *"The length of time someone can live without eating depends on their weight (or amount of body fat), health, and, many believe, attitude. Medical experts usually say the average person can live for 4 to 6 weeks without food. The amount of time someone can go without water is much shorter, roughly a week (or less)."*

The writer of John's gospel has deliberately structured some of his chapters around certain themes. In John chapter six, is all about bread and what satisfies. According to Wikipedia, the earliest evidence of bread making, is about 14, 500 years ago in Jordan. Bread has a long history.

John chapter six begins with a famous story, and it is all about bread. It is the miraculous feeding of the 5000 on the shores of Lake Galilee, and we are told this; that after everyone had had their fill, twelve baskets of barley loaves are left over. It is no surprise then, that on very next day, crowds of people seek out Jesus, no doubt to see if he will perform another miracle. We should not be too hard on them, I suspect many of us, would have done exactly the same.

The story of the feeding of the 5000 is not there just to be a miracle event. To stop there, misses the point. It is actually a living parable. It goes beyond. It point to something greater

than the story itself. The problem was this, the crowd missed the point. If they had been at that event, or heard about it from family and friends, they were now looking for more of the same. What did Jesus say, *"I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles."* They had missed the point. They were part of the miracle. Fed by it, but failed to understand its real meaning.

Their understanding was constrained by their history. I will come back to that. Their imagination only went so far as what they saw as the miraculous. Think about that, in our modern scientific era, I am not sure if many of us would even get that far! Jesus then goes onto say to them, I am talking of something on a far grander scale. Stretch your imaginations. I am talking about the eternal values of God. Jesus wants them to believe without the miracle. That's the point. This is a story about what faith is and what it is not, and as such, it is as relevant to us today as it was to the crowds who followed Jesus. Jesus is saying, look beyond the miracle.

What do the people do next? They look for another miracle! They are saying to Jesus, come on, fine words, but give us proof. After all, our ancestors ate manna in the desert. Constrained by their history. Is there an element of frustration creeping into Jesus words? Yes that was a miracle, but, it was not the bread

from heaven. If that event was real and true in the lives of the ancient people of Israel, it did not, say Jesus, contain within it, the eternal truth, or life, offered by God. Faith is about seeing beyond the miraculous.

Now, contrast these moments of miracle; in their history, manna in the desert, and in their experience; barley bread by the lakeside, contrast that with what is offered by Jesus, where he says, people will never go hungry or thirsty again. WE are now way beyond bread! What came down in the desert, Jesus says is nothing, compared to what is offered by God. *"For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* Here the stories of miracle, are becoming words of eternity.

This is deep stuff! Imagine you are part of the crowd. You come to see a miracle, or get some bread, maybe because you are literally hungry, you haven't eaten much that day, and you end up with some deep theology!

John's theology is constructed out of stories. From what he has witnessed or heard, John builds his gospel around the words and miracles of Jesus, and centre stage; are the famous "I am sayings". Jesus says to the crowds, 'I am the bread of life'. In other words, don't look for miracles, look to me. In going back to another ancient story, John is bold to declare, that Jesus has God's ancient name, and is in fact God himself. The theology deepens!

The bible challenges about what offers and sustains life. Jesus would later say, *I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness.*

In the desert, resources are scarce and the bottom line is literally life or death. The future vision of a land flowing with milk and honey, given by Moses to the people of God, was only of value to them, if they were able to eat and drink that day. That was their immediate priority. A vision alone would not sustain life.

Over a millennium later, did the people by the lakeside, who witnessed or heard about this miracle of Jesus, did they believe, in some way, this was a rerun of the old miracle? If they hung around Jesus long enough, they would be satisfied as their ancestors were.

Jesus says to them, you have got the timescale all wrong. This is no short term miracle, we are talking about eternity here. And if anything has come down from heaven. "I am".

I wonder if our minds have already jumped to another story of scripture. Men are gathered around a table, and bread is broken. The story of eternity continues. A miracle that offers life, in the name of Jesus Christ. This day and forever. Amen.