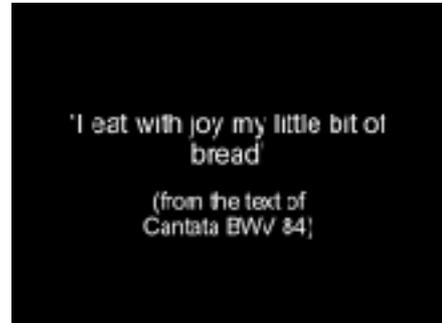


Our 'Little Bit of Bread'

John 6:35,41-51

Ich esse mit Freuden mein weniges Brot – I eat with joy my meagre bread, my little bit of bread. Those words come from the text of the Cantata today. When I saw them as I was preparing the service, they kind of leapt off the page because they make such a fitting theme for preaching on today's Gospel from John chapter 6.



John 6 begins with the miracle of the Feeding of the 5000, which then becomes the basis for the long discourse on the Bread of Life. In biblical time, and indeed throughout much of history, bread was the staple – the main food on the table, and in poor households often the only food. Thus in the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught his follows to pray "Give us today our daily bread". Luther nicely explains what that really means in the Catechism: What is meant by daily bread?

[Daily bread means] everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honour, good friends, faithful neighbour, and the like.



The words in the Canatata 'I eat with joy my meagre bread' were written for people many of whom who didn't have much to bless themselves with besides the bread on their tables. But that is not how it is for us, is it? Most of us have an abundance of food and everything else we need. Bread used to be called 'the staff of life' but for many people today bread is merely the little dinner roll on the side plate, next to the sumptuous main dish. 'Meagre bread'? Hardly. Not in most of Australia, and most assuredly not here in Box Hill. You have probably heard about 'the War against Waste'

campaign that is currently running; it confronts us not just with our abundance but with our waste. 800,000 tons of food go to waste every year in Australia just from the food industry itself—that's on top of what we waste in our homes.

One important lesson we learn from the Feeding of the 5000 miracles is that God indeed graciously provides for us our daily bread and all that we need to support this body and life and that we should receive it from his hand with thanksgiving. In the feeding miracles Jesus himself blessed the bread and gave thanks to his Father before distributing it to the people. Receiving it as the gracious gift it is means that we should use it respectfully and mindfully. Jesus saw to it that the fragments of the bread and fish were taken up after the meal – 12 baskets full, no doubt for distribution to the hungry and poor. We too should care about our daily food and all that God provides, and not squander it and waste it.

As Christians living in an affluent and materialistic culture where shop-til-you-drop consumerism is relentlessly shoved in our faces by the media and those who feed it, we need to back away, to think about what we are doing, and to live more mindfully. Ask yourself: What does it mean to live a Christ-like life in the midst of all this stuff? What is really important in life? What do I really need, rather than what do I want or crave? Can I live more simply? Can I let go of stuff so that my life is more focussed and less cluttered? Can I go without some things so that I have more to help those who don't have enough? Recently I saw a French movie and in one scene there was this poor elderly couple who piously prayed before their simple meal: Lord, bless us and the food we have, and bless those who have none. There are many places in Scripture that encourage us to be mindful of the poor and hungry, to share our bread, to give to those in need.

Let me return to that verse in the text of the Cantata:

I eat with joy my meagre bread, and heartily begrudge not my neighbour his.

Ah, but we can do more than be content and not covet what our neighbours have. We who have tasted the goodness of the Lord can heartily help our neighbours in need, whether they be neighbours next door, nearby, or neighbours in faraway places of great need – like Lombok Island in Indonesia where people, homes and livelihoods have been devastated by earthquake.

... and even more important: our other 'little bit of bread'

John 6 moves from the bread that fills stomachs to the bread that fulfils human life: The Bread of Heaven, the Bread of Life, Jesus himself. For that indeed is the real focus of John 6, of which the feeding miracle is but the prelude. As we hear in our Gospel reading, climactically, about half way through the chapter: Jesus said them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'



That is an amazing claim, and our Gospel reading shows that there were people who rejected it. V 41: Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven'. Mumble, grumble. Who does he think he is? Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? etc. In other words, Jesus, we know who you — just a nobody from Hicksville Nazareth — so you are not the Real Deal, not the Great Prophet we've all been waiting for, and certainly not the Bread of God come down from heaven.

A lot of people are thinking and saying the same thing today. Like: Jesus is not the real deal and it is delusional to believe he is. The church he began is now truly irrelevant. Christianity is on the way out. It is ludicrous to believe that a person who lived 2000 years ago somewhere around the other side of the world can do anything for us today. He didn't come down from heaven. He was deluded and it is delusional to believe he could make any difference to our life today. So, forget it. You are on your own in a tough world. But if you get your act together you can still have a pretty decent life. Of course, there are many variations, but basically that is what the unbelieving world is saying about Jesus today.

Well, as we will hear in the next Sunday or two, as the rest of John ch 6 is unfolded to us, not only did they grumble about Jesus, but in the end many of them turned their backs and walked away. Why? Because not only did Jesus say 'I am the bread of life that came down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die', but he went a step further and said 'and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh' (v 51).

Let's not duck the issue. These are confronting words, and there are more of them at the end of ch 6. You get life by eating Jesus' flesh? Is this some kind of cannibalism? Of course not, but the realism in the words, especially the word 'flesh', is confronting. So, what does Jesus Christ mean here? The claim is that Christ is the meaning of life. Christ is the bread from heaven that gives life to a hungry and dying world. And this Christ really and truly comes to those who believe in him and he gives them life, his life. When they were all turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, Do you also want to go away? Simon Peter answered, Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God (vv 67-69). Good on you Peter for saying that, because there's the nub, there's the inner truth. Jesus is our true bread because he nourishes us with the life-giving words of eternal life. But more: He is the Bread of Life because he gives us himself, his very self. People were shocked when he said, The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. That's the language of realism, but it is the very truth.

Today and every Sunday we receive and eat with joy our little bit of bread, and we drink our little sip of wine. To the unbelieving world it is a strange and meagre meal. But it is not. Because when we eat our meagre bread and drink our little taste of wine we receive Him – Christ. My body, he says, given for you. My blood, he says, shed for you. It is not, as those who misunderstood Jesus back then and still do today, believing and doing some kind of ritualistic cannibalism. No. No way. But in the sacramental mystery, Christ truly comes to us – not an airy-fairy Christ, not some vague spiritual presence of Christ, but the real and true Christ, risen and glorified, give us himself, even his true body and blood, as he said. And with Christ we receive all that he has done for us. He gave his body into death for our redemption. He shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. He was raised from the dead and lives forever so that we can pass from death to life and live forever. He comes to bring us forgiveness of sins, life that is abundant and eternal, and salvation from everything that damns us and dooms us.

Dear Christians, let's sum up this morning by hearing together the words of that verse I quoted earlier from today's Cantata:

We eat with joy our little bit of bread
and heartily leave to our neighbours their own.
A peaceful conscience, a happy spirit,
a thankful heart that gives praise and thanks,
increases its blessing, sweetens its need.

Yes, we eat our meagre bread with joy and thanksgiving because we know what it really is. And that is why this meal is often called the Eucharist: the giving of thanks. Amen.

