

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – 10th Sunday after Trinity

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All Saints' Marseille

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“Sir, give us this bread always.”

What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘bread’? Images of warmth and comfort, the scent of freshly baked loaves, memories of simple pleasures—crusty exteriors with soft, airy insides, slathered with butter or dipped in hearty soups.

Living in France, so much of our life is about bread. It is a symbol of the country, so deeply ingrained in its tradition that visiting a boulangerie and queuing with the locals to buy a baguette is a quintessential cultural experience for many visitors. However, even outside France, bread has been a staple food for tens of thousands of years across various cultures, representing both nourishment and the shared human experience of breaking bread together.

So much of our life is about food. We become what we eat, and eating can be a joyful experience, filled with thanksgiving and celebration. As we partake of the great banquet offered by Earth, we savour the delights of this bounty. When we enjoy a particular food, we often desire more and more of it: “give us this food always”.

So much of the human history, and even in the 21st century, is about scarcity of bread and hunger. Recent news highlight how local and global conflicts, along with climate change, exacerbate food insecurity. Despite technological advancements, the basic human need for sustenance remains precarious for many. Currently, more than 30 million people in 22 countries and territories are suffering from severe food crisis and are on the brink of famine.

Who am I to be condescending when I read today's passages of Scripture? Who am I to sneer when the Israelites complain in the wilderness, burdened by hunger, anxiety, dislocation, and the uncertainty of unfamiliar territory, without a clear plan for the future? Who am I to view with disdain the crowd Jesus fed with two fish and five loaves, desiring more after, perhaps for the first time in their lives, having their fill of bread? I never went to bed hungry and with the prospect of another day with little or no food. I have never been haunted by a primal fear of starving. I always eat my fill, and I can choose my bread from my favourite bakery. Instead of judging others for their ingratitude or dissatisfaction and reminding them that "one does not live by bread alone"¹, I should look in the mirror these stories hold up to me and ask myself how often I reflect the same dispositions. How often I get 'my fill', yet still remain unsatisfied?

"Encumbered forever by desire and ambition, // There's a hunger still unsatisfied," sang Pink Floyd 30 years ago². What are the hungers we seek to satisfy, that may be momentarily appeased yet never truly fulfilled? Each of us has our own unique list: it could be a hunger for meaning and purpose, a yearning for connection, a desire to be genuinely understood, a longing for joy,

¹ Deuteronomy 8.3; Matthew 4.4

² Pink Floyd, *High Hopes*, 1994

or an enduring need for wholeness and healing. And, in times like ours, a deep hunger for lasting hope.

The 17th-century French mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal compared our insatiable desire to an abyss that must be filled: “Human beings try in vain to fill it with everything around them, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself.”³

Jesus fed the hungry without reservation or pre-conditions. He who was born in Bethlehem, the name of which means ‘the house of bread’, understood that people need to be nourished. There was nothing wrong nor unspiritual about their physical hunger. Yet Jesus went beyond merely addressing these immediate needs. He invited the crowds to explore the deeper, unspoken hungers that drove them to him — hungers that only the “bread of heaven” could truly satisfy.

He promised that he himself would fulfil these deeper needs. Jesus did not wish to be merely a provider of physical bread. By calling himself “the bread of life,” Jesus identified with the essence of sustenance, with the food that would come to symbolise hope and resistance for the poor and the marginalised for centuries to come. To speak of God as bread is to acknowledge God’s most fundamental provision for us.

³ Blaise Pascal, *Les Pensées*

Jesus is this bread, and he desires to fill the deep hunger of our hearts, the aching emptiness we try to fill with lesser things. He is the bread to be consumed, to be fed upon.

It is one thing to identify our hungers, but quite another to trust that Jesus will truly satisfy them. We excel at finding substitutes for communion with God: constant busyness, social media, entertainment, the ceaseless news cycle, and even 'good works' we mistakenly believe to be 'the work of God' ... Do we genuinely trust that Jesus is our bread, our essential sustenance? More often than not, the answer is no, we don't. Jesus frequently remains an abstraction for us, a creed, a set of sayings and parables we like to quote but don't internalise. In an age marked by heightened individualism and an emphasis on self-sufficiency, we fail to recognize our daily, hourly reliance on his generosity. We do not expect to be nourished by him.

The crux of Jesus' invitation lies in whether we will transcend self-sufficiency and embrace a radical, all-encompassing dependence on a God we can taste but never control.

If we dare to acknowledge our hungers and accept Christ's call to deeper trust in God, where should we go from here? We should journey into openness and deep vulnerability, into a willingness to truly 'consume' Jesus Christ — to incorporate him into our lives daily, through practices that resonate with us: contemplation, prayer, reading, singing ... Jesus Christ desires to be more in than an inspiring example, a teacher or a source of wisdom; he wants to be our sustenance. Are we truly hungry for him? Will we allow his substance to become

a part of us? After all, we become what we eat. The bread of heaven awaits our tasting. "Sir, give us this bread always."

May we share this bread generously. May we desire it above all else. May its nourishment infuse us completely, transforming us into life-giving nourishment for the world, just as Christ is.

Feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Amen.