

**Sermon: St Andrew, Corbridge, Trinity 10, proper 13, 4 August 2024**

*May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.*

The old was truly amazing; the new seems almost unbelievable.

The old was so amazing. By that I mean the provision of bread in the wilderness for Israel under Moses. You know the story. God's people, having been rescued from slavery in Egypt, but having to learn to become God's people once again, murmured and complained against Moses and Aaron. They forgot the hard slavery, the task-masters, the servitude, and they made it sound as if their Egyptian food rations had been of Michelin Star quality. But now, they were in the arid wilderness and it wasn't clear where the next meal was going to come from. Instead of trusting the God who had divided the Red Sea, they complained. And God responded to teach Israel a lesson. In the morning, all over the ground there appeared a flaky, wafer-like substance that tasted of coriander seeds and honey. 'What is it?' they said almost in contempt. 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat'. And the provision was very specific – each morning it appeared and the Israelites had to gather enough for that day only. If they tried to keep any of it over-night it became foul. There was no provision on the Sabbath Day. On the eve of Sabbath, the Israelites were commanded to gather twice as much so as to keep the commandment to rest. This bread lasted throughout the wilderness wanderings and then ceased, but a jar of it was kept perpetually in the Tabernacle and later the Temple as the pledge and sign of God's provision. This bread they called manna and they understood it to be not merely natural bread, but the bread of heaven itself, angels' bread, holy bread, God's bread.

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In John chapter 6, Jesus is also in the wilderness, and there he feeds a huge crowd with bread and fish. A greater than Moses is here. Such is the overwhelming provision that twelve basketsful of remaining food was gathered, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. In other words, the provision is comprehensive and super-abundant – everyone ate and was satisfied. But as we read on in John's narrative, it becomes clear that this feeding, sustaining bread is not a thing but a person. Jesus himself is the bread that comes down from heaven. Coming to him, believing in him, is what satisfies every human hunger.

And this bread – this living bread is given, not just for a day, or even for a day at a time, it is given for ever. You see, the Israelites who fed on the manna in the

wilderness eventually died, and the manna ceased. But Jesus is the Bread of *Life* – to eat of this bread by coming to him, by believing in him, means that the offer of life, abundant life, eternal life, is given, a life that overcomes death.

And that is where today's Gospel ends: Jesus says to us – 'I am the Bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

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But then the argument moves on. To whom was the bread given under Moses? It was given only to Israel. But now, the Jesus, the Bread of Life, is given to the world. And suddenly, this bread is described as Jesus' flesh. 'The bread that I will give is my flesh given for the life of the world'. Here the Word who became flesh gives that flesh in order that the *world* might live – this is an unmistakable reference to the cross. Remember in John's passion narrative, upon Jesus' death, a river of life-giving water and blood flows from his side; here is life and forgiveness, flowing to flood the whole world in salvation.

And this brings us to the heart of what we are doing in this Church today. Today, by faith we come to Jesus, believing in him. And sacramentally we eat bread that is his body, his flesh, and wine that is his blood as we celebrate the cross. 'This is my body' means essentially, 'this is my *self*' – my whole being given for you. 'This is my blood' means essentially, 'this is my *life*' – for in Jewish thought life is in the blood – my life, shed for you and for many. 'This is my self', 'this is my life', given, yes, for you, but more importantly, given for the world. And our sacramental eating and drinking, is the means whereby we are reminded and assured, week by week, that the life of Jesus dwells in our very hearts – that is why we eat and drink – the sacramental food becomes part of us because the life of Jesus is part of us. He isn't up there, out there, somewhere, miles away – he is in the very core of your being. We believe in him and he lives in us.

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But this life is not given as a kind of personal possession or reward. This is life for the world. Christianity is not a kind of personal therapy, or self-indulgent comfort food or hot water bottle. It is about sharing the life of Jesus. We are sacramentally fed with his life in order that his life may be known:

*May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;  
we who drink his cup bring life to others;*

*we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.*

You know, Moses was wonderful but Jesus is more wonderful.

The manna in the wilderness was wonderful but Jesus is more wonderful.

The life the manna sustained was wonderful but the life that Jesus gives is more wonderful.

That the manna was given to Israel was wonderful but the life of Jesus given for the world is more wonderful.

And how much the world needs this life as our television screens are filled with images of hate, racism and violence, in our towns and cities, not to mention the ongoing and seemingly unending conflicts and wars that blight this planet.

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Well, believe it. Believe it, and today eat and drink believing, and as you are filled again with the love, forgiveness and salvation that flows eternally from the cross, and in your daily living and discipleship share that love, that forgiveness, that salvation. It is why we are here this morning.