

## Newington Methodist Church

Church Lane, Newington, Sittingbourne, ME9 7JT

### News and views for the week commencing 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021

**We are OPEN!**

**All are welcome to join in our  
Sunday services.**



### **Notices**

**Sunday service on 1<sup>st</sup> August in the church** will be led by Chris Chare. **Next Sunday's** service with Holy Communion 8<sup>th</sup> August will be led by R. Zachar.

- **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August circuit live stream service 10:30** will be led by Bonni Belle Pickard. Follow the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRf3NZ5y6Eo>

### **Dates for your Diary:**

- We are planning to hold our annual Safeguarding meeting on Saturday 16 October at 10am. (Paul S.)

### **People and places for prayer**

- Thank you all for prayers and help as I was with Covid last week.
- Pray for each other's health, blessing and the presence of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- We remember our friends who have died and their loved ones: Audrey, Margaret S.

*Please send news, prayer requests and any other contributions for inclusion in the weekly newsletter to [robert.zachar@gmail.com](mailto:robert.zachar@gmail.com)*

*Bank details for Offerings: Newington Methodist Church, HSBC Sittingbourne. Sort Code 40 – 42 – 04, Account 70614696. If you prefer to send a cheque contact our church treasurer Chris Ch.*

## The bread of life

A reflection on John 7:1-14 for Sunday 1 August

by Martin Smith

It may not surprise anybody that one of my favourite food is bread: crusty white, granary, soda bread, baguette, pita, nan, thin white sliced, even gluten-free. The right food is made even better by the right bread: a whole grain roll for a homemade soup, thin white sliced for a fish finger sandwich. It's not a surprise that most peoples around the world have developed a bread and that bread has been a part of the human diet since the dawn of civilisation, the manna in Exodus is sometimes called the "bread of Heaven". Supermarkets bake bread in their stores so its aroma entices us in and encourages us to buy more.

Bread is a basic of civilised life, so embedded in our cultures that it becomes part of our language. "Give us this day our daily bread", to break bread with each other, "A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou", "man cannot live by bread alone". When I was considerably younger the word bread (or dough) was used as a slang term for money, so essential did we see it to be. I came to realise just how much bread is a part of our daily lives a few years ago when my sister was diagnosed as Celiac and had to remove gluten from her diet, including wheat including most bread. No toast for breakfast, no sandwiches mid-day, no pizza for tea time. She adapted but it wasn't always easy.

I like bread! So I am intrigued when Jesus says "I am the Bread of Life". I suspect I may have been one of those people who was impressed when Jesus gave me my fill of loaves. I hope I would have listened to his reply when the people asked for bread: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry"

Now I am going to use bread as a word for what we need to give us life, by all means substitute another word if you can't or prefer not to eat bread, I am the "rice of life", the polenta of life", "the haricot bean of life", whatever gives you sustenance, nourishes you and you need regularly.

Like the world God has created for us, food isn't simply functional. It is, of course, essential for life, but it can also give immense pleasure. And more than that, eating is a very sociable activity. Many people, when they're celebrating or when they simply want to meet up together, go out for a meal. The finest meal in the best hotel doesn't amount to much if it's eaten alone in a hotel room.

So food is much more than something functional which we take merely to keep us alive. It's also something which binds us together, something which we share as human beings, something which can give enormous pleasure and which tells us we belong.

One of the favourite Biblical images of life after death is that of a great feast, a banquet. Jesus told a story about a banquet given by God where the table groans under the weight of good food, and glasses overflow with good wine. But it isn't a meal taken in isolation, in a hotel room or at a table for one. The image is of a long table, with plenty of people thoroughly enjoying themselves and the food and thoroughly enjoying the social interactivity with each other. And it's open to anyone who chooses to drop in, because those for whom it was originally intended didn't want to eat that way.

In today's gospel reading, when the people came yet again searching for Jesus, he was well aware they were looking for more miracles. "Very truly," he said, "I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." They were a people who relied on the harvest and who knew what it was to suffer from drought and therefore to go hungry, so they were unable to get past the fact that Jesus had actually produced for them food out of very

little. They could only see the miracle and failed to see beyond that. They were unable to see any sign pointing them to God. All they wanted was more food, more bread, and more miracles.

Jesus sighs over their lack of insight, their failure to go beyond the superficial, but he starts from where they are. They were dumbfounded by his miraculous abilities, especially the ability to produce food in a country which was relatively poor and where food was precious.

Jesus starts again from that point, building on the little awareness they have and pushing them always towards a deeper knowledge of God, the provider of all.

He goes on to say, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life..." and they begin to get the idea that God might provide for them in a hitherto unsuspected way. Perhaps there's a way in which they can have all this bread for themselves, when Jesus isn't around. So they say to Jesus, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" But the answer is unexpected.

They don't have to do anything! God's gift of bread which never fails, which is always there, which lasts forever, is waiting for them. They only have to believe in Jesus. They don't even have to change. They don't have to repent. They only have to believe. Although it has to be said that when people believe, repentance begins to happen and change begins to occur. But that's in God's hands, not something which the people need to initiate. And it's not the starting point. The starting point is belief.

I am grateful that Jesus starts with us where we are, it is so often so far from where he wants us to be, but he will meet us and lead us, be alongside us, on our journey.

And this is still the same today. In order to receive abundant gifts from the hands of God, we don't have to do anything. The only requirement is that we believe in Jesus. But real belief in Jesus isn't just a form of words which slip easily off the tongue, it's life-changing.

It's a belief that Jesus really is the Bread of Life, rather than a luxury "petit four" at the end of the meal. We can enjoy a luxury when we feel like it, but we need bread every day. Bread is not an optional extra. Jesus is not an optional extra, Bread gives us what we need to stay alive, and if we skip it we grow thin and emaciated and lose our energy.

But when Jesus describes himself as the Bread of Life, perhaps he's also suggesting that there's a strong communal aspect to Christianity. Although food can be enjoyed alone, and can certainly keep us alive if we eat it on our own, it loses huge dimensions of enjoyment that way, and becomes simply staple food. To really enjoy the benefit of the Bread of Life, we need to consume it together. We need to share our experiences, our worship, our Christianity. And how much we came to appreciate this when it was so difficult to meet together. We still need to share, whether face to face or by the modern-day miracles of technology.

After all, bread comes in many different shapes and sizes, made of different kinds of flour, and with or without yeast. There is bread to suit everybody, no matter what their tastes and what their dietary requirements, so we can all eat together.

Let's hope we aren't suffering from spiritual anorexia, because we're trying to exist on the luxury trifle of our own preferences and fripperies but let us share the Bread of Life together.

