Proverbs 9: 1-6; Ephesians 5: 15-20; John 6: 51-58

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

And there it is again – that technique the lectionary writers use, where a little nugget of difficult stuff from last week comes back around when we have had a few days to let the first shock sink in: the bread I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

It soon becomes clear, reading John Chapter 6, that there is something very different about Jesus. When he and the disciples are tired and need to rest, he doesn’t send the crowds who are pestering him away; he responds to them with kindness. When the crowds are hungry, Jesus doesn’t calculate how many days’ wages it would take to feed them; he looks to heaven for a miracle. And when the crowd start trying to take him by force to make him king, Jesus simply goes away to the mountain by himself.

And today, in the verses we have from John 6, Jesus describes himself as the living bread and offers himself to be consumed so that we may live. Again, something very different is going on here.

This is the fourth week in a row that we have heard Jesus teaching about bread. Even more than it is now, bread was a staple in the diet, so to talk about something so basic to people’s lives was a surefire way of grabbing their attention.

Jesus talked a lot about bread: he taught us to pray for our daily bread; he said he was the bread of life and, on the night before he died, he took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: This is my body that is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And these references to bread and life and Jesus and the eucharist are all inextricably linked.

Give us this day our daily bread. The early Christian writers - almost without exception – identified the ‘daily bread’ for which we pray in the Lord’s Prayer as the same bread as the body of Christ received in the Eucharist, the Holy Communion. So praying for our daily bread is not just about praying for all that we need physically but also about praying for the grace we need to get through life and for the spiritual feeding necessary for our strength and growth as Christians.

But it’s also a bit reminiscent for me of the children’s story of the Little Porridge Pot: as long as we remember to say the words, it will never be ineffective. But as the Israelites who ate the manna from heaven had to take only enough for that day and trust in God for tomorrow, so do we. We cannot stockpile God’s gifts to us for a rainy day. We must pray for them – and thank God for them – daily.

So Jesus is our living bread. He gives us the grace we need, he sustains us spiritually, he heals us, comforts us and strengthens us. And he says that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood abide in him, and he in them.

Abide is an interesting word, and not one that we use in day to day life. At least I don’t… We think of it as being to do with housing…..so the newspapers might report a petty criminal of no fixed abode. Or we hear it in hymns at funerals – Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. Also heard of course at Rugby League cup finals, the FA Cup final and the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games. But there is about the word ‘abide’ something of commitment

One of the modules I studied while I was at vicar school was women in the Bible, and the book of Ruth tells a fabulous story of commitment. Ruth was married to Naomi’s son, who died. Under normal circumstances, Ruth would have returned to her own family, but she chose instead to stay with Naomi: Don't ask me to leave, she says.  Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay.  Your friends will be my friends and your God will be my God. That’s proper abiding.

And it is that firm promise that Jesus promises us when we eat his flesh and drink his blood. He will abide in us, and we in him.

John’s gospel doesn’t tell us the story of the Last Supper – that appears only in the synoptic gospels – but this Eucharist/Communion/Mass is not just a symbolic memorial of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. It is a celebration of his Real Presence with us, today and every day; a means of us being fully present with him and of him being fully present with us and in us. Only if we see it like that does it all begin to make sense. No matter what, no questions asked, no sin too great to be forgiven: Jesus is with us, stays with us, perseveres with us, lives in us, abides with us. Jesus is in it for the long haul.

So Jesus is the Living Bread. He is our Daily Bread. And as we hear and say the words of this service, we are affirming not only that Jesus is our bread, but also that the bread is somehow Jesus.

And this is the very nature of a sacrament: that it is, quote, the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. Thus, the outward and visible is the bread and wine, which becomes, in the praying of the Eucharistic prayer, inwardly and invisibly the flesh and blood of Christ. So Christ is IN us and we are in union with him. The grace effected is that union with Christ.

At risk of complicating things, but in an honest attempt to do the opposite, I quote a passage from Beguerie and Duchesneau in 1980, who compared a sacrament to a hug or a kiss. *A mother who hugs her child does not need to teach it the meaning of this gesture; it springs from love and is understood as such. The sign performs an action. It is not content to show love, but brings love alive. It is not just an indication, but makes present what it shows.*

As I said at the start, it soon becomes clear, when reading John Chapter 6, that there is something that sets Jesus apart. **But that which sets Jesus apart seeks to set us as Christians in some ways apart as well….**

I can’t finish today without drawing your attention to the two other Bible readings set for this morning:

We had **Proverbs 9: 1-6** - Wisdom has built her house,… She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table…. To those without sense she says, ‘Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.’

And then we had the letter to the **Ephesians 5: 15-20** - Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,… *..* be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are exhorted to eat of the bread and drink of the wine; to lay aside immaturity and to take up life; to walk in the way of insight. And then to be filled with the Spirit of God, giving thanks at all times and in all places in the name of Jesus Christ.

It strikes me that this Eucharist, this Thanksgiving, which we celebrate at this time every Sunday, encapsulates everything that God wants of us – that we fully embrace the true life to be found in God and that we give thanks for all his blessings on us.

Jesus said, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’ And the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Sir, Lord, Master, give us this bread always.’

**Amen**