

SERMON I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

As Jeremy said at the beginning, these I AM claims of Jesus scandalised those who were the first to hear them. And is it any wonder? This is Jesus claiming to be the living breathing revelation of God. As Eugene Peterson so perfectly puts it in the Message translation of John 1:14 ... **The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.**

2,000 years on, our challenge today is probably a different one. Maybe we've have heard these claims and promises from Jesus so often, they can fail to reach the parts of our lives that most desperately need them.

We live in a world so flooded with a daily diet of information and endless opinion – a diet of spiritual and material junk food – is it any wonder that the life-giving bread that Jesus offers to us, can get neglected and goes stale.

The reason we are doing this series, is to let these claims and promises of Jesus confront us afresh.

Because there is no escaping or sidestepping the enormity of these claims of Jesus and how we make sense of them. And this is important for two reasons.

Firstly, the God we believe in, the Jesus we believe in, will shape us. Our beliefs shape all of our human experience.

And secondly, clearly for Jesus, these claims and these promises matter.

But let's start with the all-important context of this particular 'I AM' claim from Jesus. Which is... Jesus has just fed the 5,000. And there's something very unique about this particular miracle. Anyone know what it is?

It's the ONLY miracle of Jesus featured in all 4 Gospels. So it's clearly a big deal *kingdom* moment, and also worth asking... What is Jesus revealing to us when he performs a miracle?

Jesus is giving us a sign, an expression, of what it looks like when the Kingdom Way of God, the Way that nourishes us and brings true life, breaks into our earthly flesh and blood reality. When the shalom, the wholeness of the God's eternal realm, manifests and reveals itself in the here and now and moves into the neighbourhood. Eternity is now in session.

And there's a number of 'eternal' truths taking place in the 'here and now' of this particular miracle... **but at its core**, what the feeding of the 5,000 shows us is this ...

That in our time of need, Jesus provides.

Whatever your life situation and challenge, Jesus is the living bread of God's provision.

Jesus gives us the sustenance and nourishment that is life-giving.

This is Jesus' claim, and this is Jesus' promise.

And this is the main truth I want to explore and bring out today.

What's really struck me this week as I've read and re-read these incredible words of Jesus is just how much he ups the ante. How much He raises the kingdom stakes.

If Jesus had just stuck with feeding the 5,000 and accepted the grateful plaudits, he could have been the new Moses, the new **bringer** of the heavenly bread. Manna from heaven.

But instead, He makes the outrageous claim that HE IS the BREAD. Not just the bringer. He IS the bread.

“I AM the bread of life, says Jesus. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in Me has eternal life.

This is Jesus declaring ‘**I AM God.**’ And there are two key words for us to take notice of in this claim and promise because they are woven throughout the whole tapestry of John’s Gospel. And they confront us with a challenge. The word **BELIEVE** and the word **LIFE**.

And it’s helpful for all of us, to have the full perspective of what the word ‘believe’ means in the bible. In scripture to ‘believe’ means more than simply agreeing in our minds that something might be true.

The deeper meaning... is to ‘**believe, trust and have faith**’ ... in such a way, as to let this transform and shape how we live our lives. To shape every aspect of our human experience.

And clearly as far as Jesus is concerned... the more we believe in Him - the more He can give us the gift of true life. But all of this confronts us with a searching question.

How much do we truly believe this claim and this promise from Jesus for our lives?

That whatever you’re need, He will provide. That if you ‘come’ to Him, in trust and faith - He will give you the sustenance and nourishment of His life-giving presence. And this is not a trite religious question. It’s an authentic wrestling question that Jesus promise provokes in us.

As you sit here today in your own life circumstances how does this promise of Jesus speak to you? How does it speak to me?

Because I know that in our St George’s Community at this very minute, there are people grappling with huge life challenges.

We have parents who have children struggling with physical and emotional illnesses. Some of them severe. As a parent I know the amount of stress and anxiety this can bring. All parents know the truth of the wisdom saying. *“You’re only as happy as your unhappiest child.”*

We have people who have come out of toxic situations and relationships and are trying to rebuild their lives - We have people who are still in toxic situations and relationships and wondering how they can find a way forward.

There are people trying to come to terms with a trauma suffered in childhood that still debilitates them in their adult life. Unhealed wounds that continue to bleed.

And we have people who are grieving. Grieving the loss of a loved one. Loss of a loved ones health. Or simply grieving the loss of their own health.

We have people struggling daily with anxiety. That wrenching feeling in the gut that just won't let go of you. Maybe trying to keep your head above financial waters. Or just trying to cope with the anxiety of the journey into old age and all the challenges this can bring.

**All of these are our very human struggles. They are all part of our daily reality.
And none of us get out unscathed.**

But it's within these flesh and blood realities, that Jesus calls us to believe, to trust, and to have His claim and His promise. **That in our time of need, He will provide.** He will give us the life-giving sustenance of His Living Presence.

At the Abide conference, the Australian director of 24/7 Prayer Trudi Sayers, spoke honestly and movingly of her stage 4 cancer diagnosis a couple of years back. She spoke of her ongoing vulnerability as she lives with reality of her 6 monthly scans and check-ups.

And she quoted this deep, deep, wisdom from Tim Keller, who himself had to come to terms with a terminal cancer diagnosis. **"We don't realise that Jesus is all we need, until Jesus is all we have."** For me, this is my sermon in a sentence. **We don't realise that Jesus is all we need, until Jesus is all we have."**

I think all of us who have been taken to our own deep places of trial, know the sacred truth of these words. Because it's in the deep places that we are most confronted with the question of how much we believe, trust and have faith in this promise of Jesus.

I've spent all week praying on these words from Jesus. **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."** Because they ask searching questions of me.

I know that on a purely physical level, countless devout Christians down the centuries, in impoverished countries, have gone hungry and thirsty. So, it's difficult to hear this literally. And even on a spiritual level, there have been many times when I've felt the sharp hunger pangs of needing more of God's peace and presence in my life

But as I prayed on this promise of Jesus, two phrases kept resonating.

"Whoever comes to me", and "Whoever believes in me."

Isn't this the bread of heavenly wisdom for all of us?

There is a call from Jesus to commit. A call to move towards. A call to accept the life-giving invitation and experience the profound truth of Hebrews, **We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through the same weakness and testing. So, let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.**

So where in your life circumstances at this moment do you feel the need for sustenance and nourishment? Where do you recognise a need to deepen your need to believe, trust and have more faith in this promise of Jesus?

Maybe sometimes we can just overthink and intellectualize our faith *too much*. Maybe sometimes we need to simply come and trust in Jesus' promise. Ultimately, logic doesn't feed the soul.

I'll bring this altogether with one final thought.

I said at the start that what we believe is important. Because what we believe shapes us. The kind of God, the kind of Jesus we believe in, will shape our whole lived out experience.

So when we hear this promise of Jesus, we need to understand it's full biblical meaning.

“Very truly I tell you, the one who believes *has* eternal life.

When we hear the phrase 'Eternal life' most of us can default to picturing this.



Time that goes on and on forever and we wish we'd brought a magazine.

I wasn't even brought up a Christian, but it was wired into my understanding.

But this is nowhere near the full biblical expression of Jesus' promise given to you and I today.

Notice a key word in this promise of Jesus... the one who believes ***has*** eternal life. Not '*will have*' ... but **HAS** eternal life.

In John's gospel we are left in no doubt. **That wherever Jesus is and whatever Jesus is doing**, then the way of eternity is **already** present. The kingdom **has** come. The bread of life is available. And we **believe** that through the power of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus is always present. In our midst, here and now.

So as you forward to take Holy Communion today bring whatever it is you carry. Come and receive this promise from Jesus.

48 I am the bread of life. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Come and receive the living bread of His body and flesh.

Come and receive the life-giving sustenance and nourishment of the Word of God made flesh.

And as we journey this next 7 weeks together, remember that this is actually the whole purpose of John's Gospel. As he writes near the end in chapter 20:31 **All of this is written that you may believe, that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**