

Sermon for 12th August 2018. John 6.35, 41-51

To put the Old Testament story from Kings in context. Elijah, the prophet, had been zealous for the God of Israel. He had done many things in the power of the All Mighty one, and now the king's wife, Queen Jezebel is after him.

She has heard that he has the upper hand in the battle between Baal and Yahweh. That he has in fact killed all of the prophets of Baal, and to revenge their deaths, Jezebel has threatened to find Elijah and kill him. Afraid for his life Elijah flees into the desert out into the wilderness- as far removed from the action as he can get. He finds a broom tree, lies down and prays that he will die. Elijah has had enough. He wants to give up. But his wish is not to be, for an angel of God taps him on the shoulder and tells him to eat for he will need food for his journey.

I'm sure many of us can identify with this part of the story about wanting to give up when fear overtakes or simply when we have had enough of life's journey for one reason or another. And then, all of a sudden there is that tap on the shoulder – maybe a friend, bearing gifts or simply being there in supportive presence – maybe a relative – maybe even a child – but certainly an angel of the lord who has come to take us out of the wilderness.

In the story of Elijah, the prophet did get up and eat and then went on a long pilgrimage to Mt Horeb where, by tradition God dwelt, and where he was transformed and commissioned for further ministry. Now in the gospel this morning we hear another story, this one about Jesus someone who is also zealous for God. Someone who proclaims that he is the embodiment of the Word of God in flesh and blood.

Jesus methods of teaching people about God are very different to the prophet Elijah's – they are in fact counter cultural, for Jesus does not kill off his opponents – he, in fact allows his opponents to take his life on the cross.

The teachings of Jesus transpire through his life in divine authority showing compassion and love through miraculous healing and through proclamation and invitation. "I am the bread of life whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

The *I am*, in this verse is an expression of divinity and oneness with God. We are presented in this gospel with an image of Jesus himself as God's grace, God's gift of sustenance for body mind and spirit for time and eternity.

So it is, I believe, of interest to note just how people received such a proclamation and invitation? Well I think it is fair to say that it has always been met with acceptance and resistance – in Jesus own era and in ours. And in those in between. In terms of resistance, in the gospel era Jesus' identity proclamation as the bread of life, went against religious tradition.

Theologian Richard Burridge points out, that in Old Testament writings in proverbs and Ecclesiasticus it is stressed that it is wisdom that invites people to "*Come, eat of my bread*

*and drink of the wine - and that those who eat of wisdom, will hunger for more and those who drink of her will thirst for more.*¹

But this Jesus, Burridge writes, “the son of his father who sent him is superior to the teachings of the law and of wisdom. Whoever comes to him will never be hungry and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty.”² Jesus’ I Am proclamation is therefore more than, even better than their law and writings.

In today’s era, Jesus proclamation as the bread of life is also counter cultural. What is ingrained in our tradition is our independence, sense of control and sense of self-righteousness.

We are fed by many things to ensure this flourishes and continues. Who do we really need but ourselves and those who provide our technologies, research for better health and living standards, our economic stability and statistics that will ensure our personal sense of fairness.

In the gospel passage we hear how Jesus opponents grumbled and mumbled when Jesus claimed to have come down from heaven.

They know his earthly origins; he is the son of Joseph and they know his mother also. Who does he think his is to start making claims about coming down from heaven?

In today’s era we might say, well Jesus lived a long time ago. Things are different now – much better- we can go it alone– his teachings aren’t so necessary or relevant nowadays.

I believe Jesus words in response to his rejection speaks into all eras: “Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the father who sent me”.

His response is simply to say that we don’t have to work it out and hum and harr- God will open our hearts if we allow him to.

In the epistle this morning Paul makes his appeal for a changed lifestyle – for us all to put away falseness and to live in community building up each other, being kind to one another – tender hearted and to all, not just the people we approve of or like.

As we all know, I’m sure, this can be a difficult ask, yet in our acceptance of Jesus as the bread of life –we allow God to open our hearts and bring changes to our lives.

We can also be assured that when our pilgrimage into wholeness of life in him gets tough and we can go on no longer, there will be a tap on the shoulder and the Holy Spirit of Jesus will be there to feed us with the bread of life, so that we can continue our pilgrimage of transformation and receive revelation and commission as Jesus’ disciples in this world.

God’s blessings be upon you all. The Lord be with You.

¹ Richard A. Burridge. John. The People’s Bible Commentary: A devotional commentary for study and preaching:. Abington UK. P 93

² ibid

