

In our Gospel sentence this morning there is a fascinating word self-portrait of Jesus; since bread in some form, is used in most cultures known to us, whether it is the typical Australian who goes to the supermarket and chooses bread from the amazing varieties available there, or cooking damper in the outback, or the African family living in the jungle along the edges of the Congo river and baking their own bread on a fire-heated stone. Bread of various ingredients is a significant part in every place that people live and has been since perhaps the beginning of time. Bread has a satisfying quality that many other diet staples do not have.

Three observations I should like to make about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ the “bread of life”- the 3 “P’s” if you like, that he is Personality, that he is Proposing and that he is Pleasing: First, this bread called Jesus is not product, but personality. When Jesus says, “I am,” he is claiming for himself not only the very name of God, but he is claiming to be everything God is. This is something that we see seven times in John’s gospel. John leaves us in no doubt that this Jesus Christ is not just another religious leader. He is the Lord God himself. ‘For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty’ ” (vv. 33-35). Jesus wants us to know that we are saved and sustained not by a religious system or corporate affiliation, but by a connection with the person of God himself, whom Christ reveals to us as no one else, can ever do. We see this repeated twice in the scriptures, once in John’s gospel and once in Acts: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Second, we learn here that because he is personality, Jesus Christ is proposing. He proposes a relationship between the God of heaven and each one of us. As bread not eaten does nothing to quench our physical hunger and water - no matter how crystal, pure, and tantalising in the bottle - cannot slake our thirst as long as it remains there, so Jesus cannot satisfy our soul hunger and thirst until we take him into ourselves. The Gospel says, “Whoever comes to me ... Whoever believes in me.” It does not lay out any preconditions for coming.

Charlotte Elliott the great hymn writer reached a turning point in her life before she embarked on her hymn writing. She had refused to put pen to paper in this area because she considered herself unworthy. It was only the persuasion of a close friend who was a friend of the family who reminded her that you cannot make yourself ready for Christ. He will make you ready. You must come to him just as you are and he will do the changing. Charlotte’s response to that conversation was one of the great verses of hymnody:

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that Thy blood was shed for me,
and that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, and waiting not
to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am — Thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!

This is the only basis on which any of us may come to Christ. The only prerequisite for coming is to come with all your heart just as you are, without one plea.

And now the third point: We have seen that Jesus Christ is a real personality and that he desires and proposes to have a full relationship with us. Then there is this: Jesus Christ is a pleasing companion. That is, he satisfies. Listen again to what he promises in our Gospel: “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”. “He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things” (Psalm 107:9). Jesus speaks to this society of ours that is bloated with over indulgence, in potato chips, burger rings, fast food, and fizzy lemonade. He compares our deepest needs to hunger and thirst. Perhaps to us it may not mean much to speak of hunger or thirst. We use these words and what we often really mean is that we feel a little peckish for a treat or would like to stop for a Cappuccino and muffin. To those who have been truly hungry or thirsty, however, these words mean everything. There are no worse human pains than the pangs of true hunger and or true thirst. The craving for food and water are the two most powerful natural appetites for us. Jesus understands hunger. Luke records, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry” (Luke 4:1-2). It was no momentary craving for a snack that Jesus needed. He was hungry for real food. In that time of extreme hunger, Satan tried to break the weakened Christ and undermine the kingdom of God. The passage goes on, “The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man does not live on bread alone”’ (Luke 4:3-4). Imagine no food for forty days! There are two lessons for us in these verses. The first is that Satan comes to tempt us when he suspects we are weakest. And the second and most lethally is that Satan will attempt to make us believe that there is physical satisfaction for spiritual needs. Jesus, our “bread of life,” knows that and passes this gem of truth along to us.

For 20 odd years, Graham Kennedy was the king of Australian television and one would think that with a successful and long career - with a wall full of trophies and honours, letters and pictures personally signed by dozens of celebrities and awards - that Graham Kennedy would be satisfied by over three decades of success and accolades. By Graham Kennedy’s own admission, however, he felt empty and fell into a deep depression and heavy drinking when he left television. He was once described as the ‘loneliest man in television” To the Graham Kennedy’s of this world, and to all of us, Jesus comes and says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”. Christ wants to touch our lives in a way that will permanently and completely fill our deepest needs. The enjoyment of new life in him is the only happiness that ultimately satisfies. Everything else is but a shadow beside him. The enjoyment of new life in Jesus Christ is the substance of true satisfaction. Everything else is like a raindrop in the ocean. Only Jesus can satisfy our deepest hunger and thirst. His soul bread and soul drink are promised as eternal sustenance. However, before we can experience the spiritual nutrition he offers us, we must trust him completely and believe that his presence in our lives will make a difference and make us complete. Choose to love him and live in his embrace. Believe him when he says that once we connect with him, he will hold on to us and never let us go. Let us take on his Personality, let us respond to what he is Proposing and we will know a Pleasing companion all our days. Amen.

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