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ORDINARY 18B

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A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

Take time to find something in your home that you hold as precious and important. It may be a photograph, a flower or personal item. Whatever you choose consider:

- What is it that makes it important to you?
- What memories does it hold?
- How do you feel about it and what would happen if you lost it?

Now imagine that God is holding you as precious and important

- Loving and caring for you and your unique character
- Following your journey of faith
- Wanting never to lose you

When you feel able put down your object and pick up again these written words.

Come then to worship, knowing that whatever you offer in this moment is precious and important.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Readings: John 6:24-35 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the readings

These verses from John chapter 6 don't mention boats or a storm, but if we read the few verses immediately before this teaching, we see that (in verses 16-20) the disciples have just travelled by boat across the Sea of Galilee back to Capernaum. During that journey, a strong wind blew up, the lake became rough and they were (once again) terrified, not least because Jesus wasn't with them. Out of that frightening, dark scenario, Jesus approached them, walking on the water, telling them not to be afraid (which, we may imagine, only added to their terror!)

An experience like that would not be easily shaken off – their fear still clung to them as the backdrop for the verses we look at today.

Meanwhile, back on the other side of the lake, the crowd who have been around, who yesterday were fed with miraculous quantities of bread and fish by Jesus, are also confused. They had seen the disciples leave by boat and they knew that Jesus wasn't in the boat, but that's all they know. So when some more boats appear, they take the opportunity to get into the boats and cross the lake themselves, eventually finding Jesus and immediately asking a whole series of very varied questions, beginning with the practical issue of how he got there and becoming progressively more searching...

There's a sense that the crowd too are still 'at sea'. They sound confused, uncertain, doubting and wondering, calling out their questions and uncertainties... just who is this man who fed them with bread and fish in the wild? How can they know he is really from God? What does that mean for their lives?

So Jesus is speaking to people who are unsettled, who need stabilising. In that context, what does he say?

- Jesus begins by telling them that their chief interest in him is to do with the food they received yesterday: 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves'. It's as if he is saying, 'Cut the piety and admit you're more interested in free food!'
- This is followed by a challenge to go beyond that response; 'Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.'
- The crowd answers by bringing up history – the miraculous feeding they've experienced has reminded them of the story from their scriptures of manna in the wilderness – what sign is Jesus going to give?
- Some conversation follows about where exactly that food came from (God, not Moses) then Jesus concludes: 'For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'
- It seems they have been won over, convinced, as they reply, 'Sir, give us this bread always.' And that leads to the well-known words of Jesus: 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

In a few verses their frantic questioning has become a plea for what Jesus is offering, 'the bread of life'. Sadly, if you read on through the rest of Chapter 6 of John's gospel, you'll realise that whilst the crowd may respond in this way, the religious leaders have more questions, debates, doubts and difficulties to come. These words are challenging for the Jews to hear and in verse 60, even the disciples exclaim, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' But for today, we leave the story there and pause to reflect on what it may mean for us that Jesus describes himself as the bread of life.

Bread is still, in many cultures, the staple food. Whether it's naan bread or baguettes, rye bread or chapattis, focaccia or sourdough, bread is very often readily available, relatively cheap, substantial enough to be satisfying and easily digested. Although today we may be much more aware of dangers and intolerances associated with bread, I think we can still accept that the image Jesus is offering is of a basic, important food. Think of me, he says, as bread – something you need, something which won't let you down, something which will ground you, stabilise you, hold you to life. Perhaps today we too need to hear that offer and accept it – in these days of uncertainty and questions, of doubts and complexities, the simplicity and nourishment of bread may be exactly what we need.

Some questions for reflection and/or conversation:

1. In John 6, the crowd are shown as confused, anxious, uncertain, full of questions. Think about society today, what may be the questions which people are asking?
2. Does the image of Jesus as 'the bread of life' work for you? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. Are you aware now of different 'winds of doctrine' which may blow you off course? What may they be in our contemporary religious and spiritual climate?

Responding in music

421 STF – Empty broken, here I stand - [YouTube](#)

615 STF – Let love be real – [YouTube](#)

Responding in prayer

God of all grace, hear the prayers I bring for those in need this day.

- Offering prayers for the nations of the world and for this nation. There are stories of greed, exploitation, corruption and fake news all around. Grant me the courage to be an agent of change and of truth, and to strengthen all who work for the good of others. *[Pause for a moment]*.
- Praying for those who are in pain today, suffering in body, mind or spirit. In a moment of silence I hold the names of those known to me before you, asking for your healing presence to draw close to them at this time. *[Pause for a moment]*.
- Remembering those who have died, especially giving thanks for those who have demonstrated to me something of your love and grace and praying today for all who mourn their loss. *[Pause for a moment]*.

I ask all these prayers in the name of Jesus who knows each situation better than I do and whose love and healing are inexhaustible.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

Blessing

May you go out with joy and be sent forth with peace,

May the Spirit of the living God go with you.

May you be a blessing to others, and receive blessings from those around you,

Go in peace, hope and love, and in the power of the Spirit,

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers

Monday 5th August

- Go outdoors and find something natural: a stone, leaf, flower, or something else. Consider the ways God has made this thing and then reflect on how you too are wonderfully made by God. What does this mean to you?

Tuesday 6th August

- Open your Bible at the Psalms and read one as a prayer to God. What resonates with you? Consider in what ways these old words feel new to you and offer them to God.

Wednesday 7th August

- Look up a hymn or worship song on YouTube or in a hymn book and sit and listen or read the words aloud: don't do anything else while you listen. Let your mind, body and soul tune into God through the music in prayer.

Thursday 8th August

- Light a candle. Jesus is the light of the world. Pray about the places you experience darkness in your life, that Jesus light might shine there.

Friday 9th August

- Learn the name of a flower or bird that you didn't already know. Look it up in a book, on the internet, take a trip to the library, a nearby garden centre, or ask a friend.
- As you let your brain absorb this new information, offer a prayer for creation, for newness, for creativity, for our ability to learn and grow.
- What else might God be teaching you today?

Saturday 10th August

- Think about how God is at work in the lives of everyone. You can see God shining out from all people. Remember this with the next person you speak to, and give thanks for the glimpses of God you see in them.