

Thought for the Day John 6: 24-35

What types of bread do you enjoy? As a child we had the choice of white or wholemeal, with the occasional French stick as a treat. Nowadays with in-store bakeries in many of our supermarkets and the rise of artisan bakers and farmers markets we are inundated with choice. And who can resist the smell of fresh bread?

Bread is both a staple and a comfort for many people. Bread is bought by 99.8% of British households, and the equivalent of nearly 11 million loaves are sold each day. Approximately 60-70% of the bread we eat is white and sandwiches are thought to account for 50% of overall bread consumption. Average bread purchases are the equivalent of 60.3 loaves per person per year.

Not everyone eats bread with their main meal of the day but somehow a meal out in a restaurant isn't quite the same if there isn't bread on the table. Bread is the partner of many other comforting foods, cheese, jam, and of course toast and marmalade for breakfast. Bread is associated with family and friends being together through good times and bad. It wasn't rationed in Britain in either of the two world wars, but came very close to being so in both. When people were "bombed out" and when troops came home often the first thing they were given were tea and a slice of bread. Bread was rationed for a short time in 1946 when the wholemeal "National Loaf" made its debut. Bread is important, it's even been said that if you want to sell your home quickly bake some bread just before people are due to view it.

Bread features in the Bible at least 492 times from Genesis right through to Revelation. In Exodus when the Israelites bemoaned the loss of their bread, God rained bread down from heaven, manna a sort of flaky gossamer that appeared early in the mornings. God did this so his people wouldn't starve. Today we don't receive manna from heaven but God still provides for us allowing the crops we grow and all the other things we need in our earthly lives. The Jewish festival of Passover still features unleavened bread, the bread made quickly before they were saved from the Egyptians.

Bread is used to symbolise relationships in the Bible. The psalmist writes, "Even my bosom friend, whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me", (Psalm 41:9). Here bread is used to show the closeness of the relationship and the impact when it goes

wrong. It makes the psalmist's lament more palpable, it helps us understand the level of distress.

As Christians we know the symbolism of bread as life and salvation. Each time we partake of the bread, or Eucharist we are reminded of Christ on the cross, that he died for us, for you and for me. The broken bread symbolises Christ's broken body. It reminds us of Good Friday and the ultimate price that Jesus made for our lack of love; but it also reminds us of the joy of the resurrection of the glorious Easter morning, giving us hope and salvation. It's both meal and sacrifice, it feeds our body and our soul.

In the gospel according to St John, the people turn up and the first thing they say to Jesus is, "How did you get here?" They don't marvel at the miracle they witnessed yesterday when the 5000 were fed with just a few loaves and fish. They simply saw that bread as food for the body, they didn't look beyond the need to have a full stomach. Maybe they have come again looking for their next free meal. Of course Jesus gives them that meal, but this time a meal for the spirit rather than the body. Jesus tells them that *he is the bread of life* that if they feed on him they will have more than enough bread for ever, that their souls will never be hungry or thirsty. He reminds them that it wasn't Moses that gave the manna to the Israelites, it was God, and they begin to understand, they ask him to give them this bread for ever.

Jesus offers us the same spiritual bread. If we feed on him we too will be nourished and fed and we can take that nourishment into our daily lives and relationships. If we say yes to the bread of life our lives are transformed for ever. It makes us ready to be sent out into the world to live, work and pray for those who are easy to love, and those who are not. Feed us Lord. Amen.