



Nineteenth Sunday Ordinary Time 2006

1 Kings 19:4-8 Ephesians 4: 30- 5:2 John 6:41-50

This passage from John gospel needs to be situated in its context, Chapter 6:35-58. We have the first portion today, from 35-50, and the second portion, 51-58 next week. Each starts with the words, **I am bread**.

There are differences of opinion as to what we understand Jesus to be saying when he uses the image of bread. Today we will look at the passage in terms of bread as Revelation and next week, in the second part, we will pick up the theme of bread as Eucharist.

Many of Jesus' sayings that are found in John's gospel have Jewish roots.

The Word of God and wisdom are often described in imagery related to food and specifically bread. Amos, the prophet, speaks of famine across the land because of the loss of the word of the Lord. This helps us when we turn to the reading from the Book of Kings.

Elijah, the prophet, had engaged in a feud with Queen Jezebel. She had established her own prophets of Baal in the territory, it was customary when a foreign bride arrived, to bring with her the religious practices of her home territory and rivalry developed between them and the prophets of the Lord.

Elijah ordered the killings, of some of the prophets of Baal. When Jezebel heard about the killings she swore she would kill Elijah in revenge so he fled for his life.

Elijah went into the desert, sat under a broom tree, and prayed for death. This reminds us of the prophet Jonah in similar circumstances. Elijah was depressed. He slipped into sleep.

He was roused from sleep by a messenger of God who gave him food and sent him on his way. Elijah's depression came from a loss of the presence of God. He was a prophet, but the Word of God, which was his daily bread, was forgotten in the conflict he was experiencing.

Lacking the nourishment of the Word he easily fell prey to discouragement.

The words of Jesus in John could easily be directed to Elijah, Jonah or any person today, who feels discouraged by the problems facing our world. We all need the bread of wisdom as the problems we face are complex and cannot be addressed by instant solutions or answers that sufficed centuries ago. The answer, Jesus says, lies in our motivation. We need to check out the reasons for our actions.

We are to be engaged in doing what we discern to be God's will. This is not something that is always obvious.

To mill forests or preserve them; to share power or to exclude; to explore modifications to genetic material or to ignore possibilities; everyone has to deal with one or a variety of major issues on a regular basis.

The problems we face in the twenty-first century are our own. There are no concrete solutions that we can apply today, to be found in the Bible.

If we believe that God is with us then what we will find from the Word of God is the right attitude or will to bring to the problems.

To attempt to be a faithful disciple does not mean we will always get it right but our discernment with and in our community will prevent us from errors caused by expediency. We have the promise of Jesus that we will never go spiritually hungry and we have a wealth of resources.

The image that suggests itself is that of a food hall in a shopping centre, over-abundance and a tantalising variety. Our biggest challenge is to select the food that leads to eternal life. By this is meant more than a narrow focus on life after death but rather eternal life in John's meaning of the phrase; life lived here and now clothed in Christ.

Ephesians, with great faith and optimism, tells us to imitate God. The exhortation to get rid of all bitterness is appropriate when we read of so-called Christians making fierce judgements against fellow citizens which almost amounts to incitement. We are called to be kind to one another, compassionate and mutually forgiving.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.