

Proper 13 9th Sunday after Trinity – 1st August 2021
Ex 16:2-4,9-15; Ps 78:23-29; **Ephesians 4:1-16**; **John 6:24-35 - Holy Cross, Durley**

We all have books which have influenced our thinking. One of mine, as a teenager, was 'Mister God this Is Anna, by Fynn. A line has stayed with me about 6-year-old Anna's shock and disbelief, once people had been to church to get the message about Mister God, that they ever went back. Over the years I have been challenged by this. Trying to live the Gospel message is why I remain.

Jesus and St. Paul were good at presenting challenges. Today's challenge is to look, as Gregg proposed last week, through compassionate eyes and with Love in our hearts. Worshippers in Ephesus and those on the shore in St. John's Gospel were not doing either of those things. They were seeking something for themselves.

Jesus said, *"Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."*

St Paul wrote, *'We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine.... 15 But, speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...'*

I wonder, are we, as a congregation, seeking something for ourselves or are we growing in love and becoming Christ-like? The crowds around the lake wanted to connect Jesus' 'signs', as John called them, with their own historical inheritance; Moses and the Law. Jesus carefully

re-directs them from Moses towards himself, standing right there in front of them. Jesus then taught that 'manna in the desert' no longer had nutritional value. It was he himself, doing God's work by feeding the hungry and thirsty who was their true inheritance. All the crowds needed to do was to believe and they would be joining in that work.

Did the crowds join in? They certainly wanted to. *'Sir, give us this bread always'* they asked. They were ready to hear the message so Jesus knocked them down with a feather as he declared, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

What can this mean for us? I think the answer depends on who we are talking with. If someone has addictions or is out of a job it will mean something different to someone whose home has been washed away in floods. To materially rich people it will have spiritual significance. But, the beauty of Jesus' words, spoken for all, are that they communicate with everyone regardless of feast or famine.

When you go home, [Oh! You are home!] have a read of today's Psalm, 78. You will find a potted history of God's goodness and Israel's ingratitude toward that goodness. God's good gifts are constantly thrown back in his face, so to speak. I wondered if Jesus knew this might happen to him. Nevertheless, he offered himself to the crowds as the bread of life because he, like his Father, exudes

loving-kindness and mercy, not judgement, whatever the cost to him.

American Bishop Gene Robinson popped up on my Face Book on Tuesday. "It's funny, isn't it? That you can preach a judgemental and vengeful and angry God and nobody will mind. But you start preaching a God that is too accepting, too loving, too forgiving, too merciful, too kind...and you are in trouble." I thought this pretty much summed up Jesus as he used the image of bread, a staple of life-giving and spiritual food, to represent his own life meeting people's hunger and thirst.

As I'm sure you're aware, PCC's have been discussing ways forward for the present and future of our Deanery and Diocese. It is proving to be a complicated but fascinating process with all kinds of human reactions rising to the surface. For me, this is just the right moment to hear today's Gospel message through compassionate eyes and loving hearts because, if our responses are about ourselves and what we want, we, like the lakeside crowd are missing the point. It is the worshippers of the future who need the bread of life. We have eaten this bread and have a responsibility to share it. Last week, Gregg offered us five loaves and two fish as images of the possibilities when we change priorities and find solutions. There are people who have heard Jesus' invitation and are searching for ways to respond which won't entrench them but send them out. How can we be there for them, those strangers and foreigners, the widows and orphans, the

broken-hearted, sick, poor and oppressed? It's time for us, like bread, to rise to the challenge...

I invite you to take a careful look into the icon. Robert Lentz is a Franciscan Brother who has served '*the Christ who lives at the margins of this world.*' He knows people who have been imprisoned for their work among the poor, the broken and the oppressed so he created this icon of Jesus, wearing a refugee's T-shirt, to thank them for the risks they have taken to bring Christ to crowds whether by a lake or sleeping on the floor of a hotel room in Kent. Take a few moments to reflect: is Jesus behind the barbed wire, or are we?

God of Moses, who rained down bread on Israel's wandering people: lead us to the food that never leaves us craving, addicted to consuming, but fills our whole humanity with life enough for all; through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.

