

2nd August 2026 – Morning Service

Feeding the Multitude – Lammastide

Margaret Bradley

Introduction

The first day of August has long been celebrated by European Christians as Lammas Day, or 'loaf mass day'. This marked the gathering of the first grains of the season, as opposed to the end of the harvest. The name of the festival derived from the custom of baking some of the new crop of wheat into a loaf of bread and offering it at church at a special celebration of Mass, or communion. Our Scripture readings today centre around the theme of bread satisfying people's hunger.

You may wish to have a loaf of bread as a visual focus for this service.

Call to Worship

Christ dwells among us and is one with us. So, come now all who thirst, and drink the water of life. Come, all who hunger, and be filled with good things. Come, all who seek, and taste how good God is.

StF 25 – God is here!

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| 1) God is here! As we his people
Meet to offer praise and prayer,
May we find in fuller measure
What it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
All our varied skills and arts
Wait the coming of his Spirit
Into open minds and hearts. | 3) Here our children find a welcome
In the Shepherd's flock and fold;
Here as bread and wine are taken,
Christ sustains us, as of old;
Here the servants of the Servant
Seek in worship to explore
What it means in daily living
To believe and to adore. |
| 2) Here are symbols to remind us
Of our lifelong need of grace;
Here are table, font, and pulpit;
Here the cross has central place.
Here in honesty of preaching,
Here in silence, as in speech,
Here, in newness and renewal,
God the Spirit comes to each. | 4) Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom,
In an age of change and doubt,
Keep us faithful to the gospel,
Help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,
All we have to give, receive:
We, who cannot live without you,
We adore you! We believe! |

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Prayer of Adoration

We praise you, O God, because you are the good, wise, eternal Maker of all that is, and you sustain everything by your creative power. When the ancient Israelites wandered in the desert, you provided manna to keep them going. You fed them on their journey and saved them from desolation and despair. When the meaning of life eludes us and we appear to go round in circles you offer us, too, living bread through our Lord Jesus Christ. Your care is never removed from us, and nothing is ever able to separate us from your all-embracing love. Through the yeast of your Holy Spirit, you mould us and shape us from being lumpy dough into bread for the world. So we come to honour you for giving us life, to offer our adoration for your mercy and grace which comes to save and renew, and we lift up our hearts in worship to you, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

We come to find our nourishment here. When we are not satisfied with our lives, when we have forgotten your goodness and been envious of another, lift us from complaining to praising. When we have been

unmindful of the needs of others and fail to share your bread with all, but keep it close to ourselves, release us from our selfishness. When we have made wrong choices, help us to hold on to what is right. When we have judged others, forgetting that in doing so we ourselves are judged, have mercy on us, for we live by your forgiving grace. In Christ you have offered yourself, you have been broken, in order that we might be made whole. Thank you that you are always ready to receive us and, in this moment, now set us free from everything that keeps us from knowing life in all its fullness. **Amen.**

Collect for the Day

Lord and giver of life, you alone nourish and sustain your people through Christ, the bread of life. Feed our hunger and quench our thirst, that we may no longer work for what fails to satisfy, but do what you require, in obedience and faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Reading: 2 Kings 4: 42-44 (NRSV)

A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD: They shall eat and have some left." He set it before them; they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

StF 825 – Psalm 107

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| 1) O give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious,
for his steadfast love endures for ever. | 6) So they cried to the Lord in their trouble
and he delivered them from their distress. |
| 2) Let the redeemed of the Lord say this,
those he redeemed from the hand of the enemy, | 7) He set their feet on the right way
till they came to a city to dwell in. |
| 3) And gathered out of the lands
from the East and from the West,
from the North and from the South. | 8) Let them give thanks
to the Lord for his goodness
and the wonders he does for his children. |
| 4) Some went astray in desert wastes
and found no path to a city to dwell in. | 9) For he satisfies the longing soul
and fills the hungry soul with good. |
| 5) Hungry and thirsty,
their soul was fainting within them. | |

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Reading: Matthew 14: 13-21 (NRSV)

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

A supernatural miracle or a sacramental meal?

The story of Jesus feeding a crowd of 5000 with five loaves and two fishes is the only one of the miracle stories that was included in all four of the Gospels. As Matthew and Mark each tell the story twice, we have a total of six versions of the same event. It was obviously very important to the early church. But what is its significance for us today, living in the Vale of Stour in the 21st Century?

Some Christians would say that this was a supernatural miracle that's a marvellous example of the extraordinary powers that Jesus had. They would say that Jesus' uniqueness meant that he had the ability to manipulate and suspend the God-given laws of nature whenever he felt like it. For others, this poses an obstacle to faith. If Jesus knew of a technique whereby five loaves and two fish could literally feed thousands and didn't pass it on to a world in which people starve to death, what sort of ethical credibility does that give him? What on earth would we think of a medical researcher who discovered a cure for cancer and then kept it to himself? A supernatural miracle interpretation misunderstands the allusions in the story as the gospel writers tell it. They were conscious of how their great religious leaders, Moses and Elisha, had satisfied people's hunger in the past, and they saw Jesus repeating what had been done by them, because he was the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets, and a sign of the new age to come. None of them says that Jesus multiplied the numbers of loaves and fishes. They are simply said to be sufficient when they were distributed.

Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and gave it to them so that each person present had a piece to eat. Does this ring any bells? Think about what Jesus did at the Last Supper when he gave his disciples something by which they could remember him and recall his presence into their midst. Think about what our ministers do whenever they preside over the sacrament of Holy Communion. Following Jesus' actions at the Last Supper, and the actions of presbyters throughout Christian history, they take bread, give thanks, break it, and distribute it to a communal gathering of Jesus' followers. It would seem that what we're really looking at here is an act of worship, an open-air communion service, with bread and fish. Hang on, you may say, we have bread and wine, not bread and fish. John's Gospel doesn't record Jesus giving his disciples bread and wine at the Last Supper, but he does say that the risen Christ fed his disciples with bread and fish on the shore of Lake Galilee. And there's a lot of evidence showing that a fish was a symbol of the Eucharist in the earliest days of Christianity. As the first Christians heard this story, they would be aware of their own Eucharistic sacrament, which was shared by all those who called themselves followers of Jesus. Although we're given only a crumb each, Christ's presence makes the feast. That's what we sing in one of our old communion hymns. We go on to give thanks that in this sacramental crumb we've been given a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, and we are satisfied.

Shared meals are signs of our mutual support and how much we belong to each other. We see this in the way that families come together over Christmas dinner, and how Muslims invite Keith and me, along with other members of our local community, to their Iftar meal in their holy season of Ramadan. The bread we share and the community we form as we eat it are a sign that we are bound together in God's love. So, according to this interpretation, Jesus didn't miraculously multiply loaves and fish. He offered spiritual nourishment to the crowd of people around him with the bread of heaven, with food that doesn't perish. That there was so much left over suggests that there was enough to feed not only those present at that time, but all who have gathered since to share in the breaking of bread.

StF 571 – As your family Lord

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| 1) As your family, Lord, see us here,
As your family, Lord, see us here,
As your family, Lord, see us here,
O Lord, see us here. | 2) At your table, Lord, we are fed;
At your table, Lord, we are fed;
At your table, Lord, we are fed;
O Lord, feed us here. |
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3) Fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
Fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
Fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
O Lord, give your love.

4) Make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
Make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
Make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
O Lord, to your will.

Unknown

A miracle of shared resources?

The story of Jesus feeding a multitude could be an account of a sacramental meal, but there are other interpretations. Many preachers today see this as a miracle of shared resources, a triumph of generosity over selfishness. Jesus was followed out into the country by a large crowd. When it appeared that Jesus' disciples had no means of feeding the people because the available amount of food was very small, others were inspired to chip in with their resources, and the pooled supplies turned out to be spectacularly more than enough.

At the start of Lent 2012, my household took up a Methodist Relief and Development Fund challenge to limit our spending on food to just £1 a day per person for a 5-day period. This served as a reminder that the majority of people in the world have only a small amount of money available to buy food. As our son was living with us at that time, we began with £15 and nothing else. I started by buying some essentials to provide a basic store cupboard of salt, flour, margarine, milk, rice, eggs, potatoes, onions, teabags, sugar, cheese, oats, etc. I then looked for bread, fruit, and vegetables that had been reduced in price because they had reached their sell-by date. We finished with 3 pence to spare, so that we raised £700 for a MRDF (since re-named All We Can) project. (Food was cheaper 14 years ago!). We found that it was easier for us, with three in the household, to have £3 a day than it is to manage on your own with £1. When a whole community shares its resources in this way, there are even greater opportunities. This is how many villages in Asia, Africa, and South America are able to cope. Those who are old enough to remember the rationings of war, and the street parties to celebrate the end of the hostilities, will recall communities pooling their resources to provide a feast in which all shared. Our society seems to emphasise an individualism that is distant to societies which tend more towards interdependence and social responsibility, and which have a lot to teach us about co-operating together and being 'one body.'

Here, I think, we have a relevant Gospel message for a contemporary world, where there's an enormous need for food to be shared and more evenly distributed. That amazing things can happen when we share our resources.

StF 243 – A rich young man came seeking

1) A rich young man came seeking -
God's kingdom was his aim.
The law had been his guidebook.
His life was free from blame.
But Jesus asked the courage
To give his wealth away.
The young man turned in sorrow,
That price he would not pay.

2) The rich men's gifts were lavish
And made for public show.
The widow's gift was humble
And only God would know,
In giving to the Temple,
Although her coins were small,
Her gift had so much meaning
Because she gave her all.

3) One boy brought loaves and fishes,
No other food was there,
But Jesus fed the thousands
And still had bread to spare.
The miracle of plenty
Soon spread beyond that place.
That simple gift was offered,
Then multiplied by grace.

4) Lord, keep our care for money
From turning into greed.
Help us to use it wisely
To meet each other's need.
For whether poor or wealthy,
We have so much to share
And open-hearted giving
Will show your loving care.

A parable about using what we have?

The suggestion that something marvellous happened when Jesus encouraged people to pool their resources isn't something to be sneezed at. That idea might yet turn out to be the hope and salvation of a world gone wrong, but this is a future vision and, although it's important to have long-term ideals, there is something that we can apply right away. So I point you to another interpretation. Some bible scholars believe that this story was originally a parable and as the story was re-told it became a miracle story. They maintain that the point of the parable was that limited resources in the hands of Jesus can turn out to be more than enough. Jesus gave his disciples responsibility for feeding the crowds. When Jesus said to the disciples, 'You yourselves give them something to eat', their reaction was to doubt their capabilities to do it. They were aware of their inadequacies. They didn't have the resources. But, when handled properly, what seemed to be insufficient turned out to be more than enough.

If we read the story in this way, the question that I put to you is, 'How many loaves do **you** have?'. We're very aware of what we don't have, as individuals and as a church, but instead let's start concentrating on what we **do** have, because that's the question that Jesus asked: 'What have you got? Let's see what we can do with it.' And that's the point of the story. You might think that you're too old, or that your children are too young, to be of much use. You might not be able to give as generously as you would like with your money, but you might be able to offer some of your time to God's service. Or you might be so busy with work commitments that you don't have the same amount of spare time that others have, but you have the extra wealth. We may think that we have insufficient numbers to do very much, but if we use what we do have to the full we can achieve great things with God.

So, what do **you** think about the story of the feeding of the multitude? Was it a supernatural miracle? Was it an open-air communion service? Was it about pooled resources being the answer to food shortages? Was it a parable about using what we do have rather than feeling that we can't do things because our circumstances pose limitations? There are different ways of interpreting this story and we'll need more than one of them. But you know the saying 'use your loaf', which comes from rhyming slang 'use your loaf of bread' i.e. your head. I say to you this Lammastide, 'for God's sake, use your loaf,' and urge each one to commit ourselves to using what we do have for God's glory, wherever we stand on our journey of faith.

StF 663 – I the Lord of sea and sky

1) I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Ch) Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

2) I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them - they turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

3) I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them - my hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Giving Thanks

We give thanks to God, for all the ways that our lives have been blessed. For the splendour and beauty of creation, and opportunities to enjoy it. For the life that we have been given and the love and friendship we have been shown. For the food that we daily enjoy. We give thanks for Jesus, our Saviour, for his life and teaching, for his death and resurrection, and for the lasting satisfaction that he alone can give. We give thanks for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our own lives, in the life of the world and in the work of the church. For each gift, so freely given, we are truly grateful. Generous God, accept our thanks, our love, and our lives dedicated to you. Continue your work in us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

God of faith, we pray for all who experience a spiritual hunger; that it might be satisfied. We pray for Christians throughout the world, the Church, which is the body of Christ today and which shares in one bread, uniting us with Jesus, and with one another, in all places and throughout the generations. We pray for the Methodist Church in our own land, hungry for your Spirit to come afresh, for your rule to come on earth. For our newly elected President, Rev Mark Slaney, Vice President, Caroline Stead, and for the current Youth President, Genesis Padgett, as they begin their year of office. We pray for all ministers, especially those who are moving on to new appointments or who are retiring. For Rev Rachel Moss who will be joining the team here, and for Rev Michael and Rev Chris who have left us. We commit to you all the congregations in this neighbourhood and Circuit. May there be miracles of growth. Nourish us all, build us up, draw us into a closer unity and companionship so that we grow together in faith and love and service, more like you. Bread of Life; **feed the world.**

God of mercy, we pray for the people of the world, hungry for hope, peace, and justice, for freedom from pollution and oppression, from warfare and want. We pray for those who are deprived of food, because of armed conflict, drought, and famine. May there be miracles of reconciliation, good stewardship, and sharing. Bread of Life; **feed the world.**

God of love, we pray for our society, hungry for a vision of better things, for a sense of purpose and unity in fractured and polarised communities. For those who rely on welfare benefits, those who run food banks, or provide meals. May there be miracles of trust and harmony, goodwill and neighbourliness. Bread of Life; **feed the world.**

God of compassion, we pray for those who have a particular hunger and thirst in their lives because they are distressed, anxious, bereaved, or unwell. Sustain them in their need, and may there be miracles of healing and restoration. Bread of Life; **feed the world.**

God of glory, we remember those who have died and entered into the light of your eternal presence. Bring us with them into the fulness of unending joy. Bread of Life; **feed the world.**

We pray for ourselves in our need, hungry for you and seeking your way. Fill our lives with all that is good and grant that that which we pray for, we may effectively work for, so that your will may be done. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 465 – Guide me O thou great Jehovah

- 1) Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.
Feed me now and evermore.
- 2) Open thou the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer, Strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield.
Be thou still my strength and shield.
- 3) When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, Songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams

Blessing

May God feed and sustain you on your life's journey. May God encourage you and strengthen you as you endeavour to be a faithful disciple of Christ. May God bless you with the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, now and for evermore.

Go out with joy, to feed hungry mouths and lives, in the name of Christ. **Amen.**