

Wednesday 8th July

John 6:41-51

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

A number of years ago I was attending a wedding. I was looking through the order of service prior to the service beginning and looked at the hymns. One of the hymns to be sung was "I the Lord of sea and sky," (Singing the faith 663). In Verse 3 is the line "Finest bread I will provide." When I read it I turned to Anita and said, "I was hoping for more than bread after the service."

Well later on in the day we were provided with much more than just bread and a fine meal it was too with some wonderful company. My appetite was satisfied.

The Jews who were listening to the words of Jesus looked at things in a purely earthly sense. They knew who Jesus was in an earthly sense but could not accept him as having an eternal, divine, identity.

Speaking of coming down from heaven was not comfortable to their ears. When he went on, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh," that was definitely more than they could cope with.

We are so focussed upon the earthly world we live in that we are not always very good at looking at things from a spiritual sense.

The hymn writer of course went on beyond provide "Finest bread I will provide till their hearts are satisfied".

Our "hearts being satisfied" is a way of saying our Spirit being satisfied, our spiritual needs being met. Our spiritual need is met in the giving of the life of Jesus, "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

To those of us within the faith world of the Christian Church we read these words with a simple acceptance and often give them very little thought for they are so familiar to us.

For a moment try to put yourself in the place of the first hearers – that is difficult you will quickly say for the majority of us do not have enough knowledge of 1st Century Jewish thought and understanding.

Now put yourself in the position of a person with little spiritual background in the 21st Century. What will they make of such phrases?

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

I don't know but I am sure many will struggle.

In this strange time of "Lockdown" many people from outside faith communities have been seeking out a new perspective on life. As we are drawing nearer to a time when we can meet with others more easily face to face, and "others" may come and join us in worship what will they make of some of our taken for granted phrases? How would we explain them?

Earlier this week I was asked by a URC minister what does the phrase "welcomed into full Connexion" mean? I struggled to give a quick and coherent answer.

It is easy to use words and phrases and take them for granted without being able to explain what they mean.

What does "Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever," mean to you?