



THE NEW SHOFAR

God is a God who is feeding his people

1 Kings 19:4-8 - John 6:41-51

Trinity 11

God is feeding his people – but we need to know where to go to be fed

Since the time of the feeding of the Hebrew people with manna from heaven and water from the rock during the time of the Exodus, the people had longed for that future time when God would once again intervene and directly feed his people. For the Jews this would be the End Time, the final days of creation. It was a hope sustaining them in difficult times and encouraging them to keep their eyes on God. This was manifested in their expectations of a messianic saviour, to a time when God would take them under his direct care. It remains a powerful and wonderful image – God as the One feeding his hungry children. God was understood as being the One slaking the thirst of his struggling people.

Jesus is God’s gift of food for every human need

What John is teaching his Church is that Jesus is our Heavenly Father’s gift of life. When we experience “hungers”; when we are “thirsting” for a way forward, for hope, for life and for light in our most human of moments, Jesus is God’s gift to us: a living and powerful gift in the midst of our struggles, while we struggle. We may be looking for “*physical bread*” as were the Jews challenging Jesus. They wanted more of the kind of food they saw on the mountain, a miraculous action, a spectacular intervention by God. If Jesus could turn a few loaves and a couple of fish into food for five thousand people, he can surely address my current problems! It is all too easy for our faith to be weakened when God does not act in the way we expect or demand. John is stressing the way Jesus is life – life-giving in whatever situation we find ourselves. He tells us how Jesus is like food to us. Our daily life cannot be sustained without physical-earthly food. But we are more than mere physical creatures. In order to be fully human, fully alive in this world and as well obtain eternal life in the world to come, we need Jesus, we need to live our lives around Jesus, modelling Jesus in all we do and say.

To find God’s gift of food we need to be living in Christ

The Jews could accept the idea of God feeding them but understood it to be something God had done in the past (during the Exodus with the manna) and will be done in the future, at the End Time when God brought all things to an end. Jesus does not deny any of this but he adds a couple of key additions. *The first* is how God continues to feed them in each and every moment of each and every day of their lives. *The second* key revelation here is that if anyone hungers for *life* they will find satisfaction in Jesus and only in Jesus. All that is needed is for them to *come to him*. We must leave behind a reliance on some of the alternatives to Jesus upon which we build our lives and acknowledge we are in need of God. This is what makes faith so difficult and why it takes a lifetime of prayer, sacrifice and effort to follow Christ.

Jesus is our gift of life – but do we really need God?

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It is always comforting to find Jesus offering us great reassurances in terms of our lives here on earth and at the same time guaranteeing what happens to us after death. The promise here is that those *coming* to him and *believing* in him as God's Son (and the world's Messiah) will have a whole new life of blessing (in the present age) and will live with God for eternity in heaven. John does not put this into the Gospel as a quick fix for our lives or as an easy way to renew and transform the world. John understands how difficult it will be, impossible for those who are not aware of their need for a relationship with God.

What God is doing today is what God has always done – gives life

We are told how it is God's will that we live with him in heaven. God seeks us out that we may live in eternal joy. We are reminded how this is the very reason God sent his Son – so that we have the way to life and to find eternal life opened up for us. One of the major problems for those seeking life is exposed here in the conflict with the Jews. They try to understand the divine by using human vision, human understandings. All they can accept is that Jesus was from Nazareth, that his mother was Mary and his father was Joseph. Therefore, he could not be from God and could not therefore claim God to be his Father. This heresy was a major challenge to the early faith communities as they battled with the Jews to be seen as the ones fulfilling the biblical traditions going back to Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets. In John's Gospel, accepting God and obeying the divine command is a gift of faith. It is an invitation to us. Jesus is stressing how disciples first of all need to want God in their lives; need to understand their human limitations, weaknesses and failures. Faith demands we look at the world through eyes that have been touched *from above*. It does not mean we abandon all science, logic, experience and popular opinion. It does mean we look at the world as having more to it than we can ever understand, define or control. Faith is not a "leap into darkness", it is the acceptance of a man, one like one of us, as being a gift from God, one sent to bring life, to restore us to our original existence. It is in this part of the sermon of chapter six that we can see how Paul could have written about those who believe, that in death *life is changed, not ended*. How good is that!

'It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.'

Here in our first reading we have the prophet Elijah fleeing from Jezebel, fearing for his life. He has been about the work of God and believed he was owed at least protection from the evil carried out by his enemies. He has given up on God. He had been willing to believe when things were going well, when powerful heavenly power flowed through him and the world knew there was indeed a prophet of God in their midst. Now, however, he is being called upon to dig deeper, to trust in God and place his hopes in divine graces to see him through this darkest time in his life. We see him here on the verge of giving up on living. Hopeless. Uncertain. Word down.

At this moment of hopelessness and angel of the Lord (a biblical way of saying God) came to him and fed him with food from heaven. He was fed twice. After that second feeding we find the amazing and significant observation: *then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God*. A little bit of food was all he needed to overcome his very human fears. Not only did he get moving again, he walked for *forty days and forty nights!*

This is the point John is making in today's story about Jesus. The more of our lives we bring to God, in Christ, for healing, restoration and hope, the more we are able to continue our journey to *the Mount of Horeb* – whatever that journey may mean for each one of us. It is all about the way we go about modelling our lives on Jesus, not just in our worship of God, but in the way we live each day.

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