



August 8th

THE NEW SHOFAR

The Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, the gift of Communion with God and Christ, a gift won for us on the Cross

This is enough, O Yahweh! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers

I do love this complaint from the prophet. Things have gone wrong for him; his world is falling apart and Jezebel is pursuing him in order to kill him. If God truly was God, surely He would not allow bad things to happen to good people, particularly those who were His servants. How true this kind of feeling is! God is great and He is widely praised when things are going well and evil seems to be defeated. But when the pain and anguish falls on the believer, God becomes the first under question.

We forget the promise made in today's psalm...*The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.* The psalmist here celebrates and give thanks for the presence of God with them as they make their way through the wilderness. Yahweh is no distant God reigning from a remote heavenly throne. He is a *God-with-them*. The image in the psalm is one of warfare, a people going into battle with their enemies. There is no promise of a battle free journey to Canaan. The promise is that God is with them as they journey, as they battle, as they continue with their journey to a new life. It is an invitation to hope, to journey on in faith.

Then God sends His Son to clarify how this all works

Jesus makes powerful, exciting and reassuring theological claims about himself and so about what God is offering: ***"I am the bread of life"***. What is important in today's reading is the way this **"I AM"** declaration deliberately links the ministry and mission of Jesus back to the experience of Israel during the Exodus. There, God revealed the divine name to Moses – ***I AM***. It is difficult to translate this from the Hebrew into English but it could read something like this: you can trust me (God) because ***I am*** now, as ***I have always been*** and ***I always will be***. God is the rock, the foundation on which you can continue to Canaan because ***I AM*** is with you as your God. He is *encamped* around you, with you – allow Him room to show His love.

While that might seem to be a bit abstract and complicated, Jesus makes it concrete when He declares Himself to be bread, essential food for life, the vital "ingredient" for living as fully alive and refreshed human beings. It follows on from the equally concrete miracle of the feeding of the 5000. Feeding is not just what Jesus does, but it is also who Jesus is. He himself is the food (the life!) for which they are searching. He has come from heaven to show them God and to give them life.

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But all is not well with the crowd. They are in fact scandalised by this declaration. He, like bread, is known to them. They know His mother and His father. They have watched Him grow up. How on earth can He make this claim of coming from heaven? Yet Jesus stands firm in His claim that He himself is revealing God and carrying out the will of God in a unique way. It is the Way God is working among them. To know Jesus is to know God. To walk with Jesus is to walk with God.

But this imagery is all too much for people who want material “food”

His audience’s preference is for God and God’s will to be something more abstract, something we can keep at arm’s length. The thought of God being with us, in us even, as we go about our daily activities can be a little challenging. It is easier to have God safely quarantined to the stories of the past. That frees us to engage in vigorous debates about God and maintain comfortable “ideas” about who He is and how He is working today. However, what Jesus claims here is that God is a living God, is a vital part of our human DNA and to ignore Him is to isolate and ignore a fundamental part of our identity. No wonder the world is in a mess.

Here is the challenging bit. While the people in the Gospel were running around looking for “bread” from, Jesus, He was offering them something even more powerfully invigorating and enlivening. He was giving them what God His Father knew all men and women required – union in Him. This union is enabled in Jesus the Bread of Life. Partaking of this Heavenly Bread is to be at one with Christ.

Do not put all of your trust and hopes in human, material promises

See what God had done? He has answered these real needs by showing up in the flesh demanding our allegiance to a new way of life. Not simply offering material “bread” – they could eat that today and be hungry tomorrow. They could find that kind of “bread” in a multitude of ways. The Bread Jesus was offering them was eternal in nature. It touched their human living in ways they could never imagine and transform them in ways they deeply desired and needed even if they remained unable to articulate these needs.

But Jesus the Bread of Life is food indeed

Jesus is this Bread of life for He comes to teach us again that the world is given to us as communion with God. Even food is meant to be communion with God, a place where God meets us in our primal desire, one of our most fundamental needs. That is why Jesus gives us the sacrament of Communion. For in communion, we learn to use the gifts of God’s creation rightly. Wine and bread—these wondrous things born of human labour wed to mysterious natural processes of growth, leaven, and yeast—are gifts of God’s good creation, lifted back to the Creator in an act of Eucharist, of thanksgiving. And through the sacrament of the Eucharist we encounter the risen Christ, who has given us the bread of life that is His flesh. Through the Eucharist, we receive the world as God’s gift as a means of communion with God

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