

**5<sup>th</sup> October, 2014.**

**Reading: John 6: 24 - 35**

**Sermon: Food That Endures**

There are many passages in the Bible with which we are familiar. We would probably even go as far as to say that we know some of them very well and yet it never fails to amaze me when I read a familiar passage and see something new.

What I noticed in this passage was the question that was put to Jesus by the crowds. They said to Him: **What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?**

The request for a sign from the crowds who went in search of Jesus is quite something. Jesus said to them that all God required of them was that they believed in the one He had sent. In other words, all they had to do was believe in Jesus himself. In response to that, the crowd want to know what sign Jesus will give them so that they can see it and believe Him.

This is the same crowd who were fed when the wee boy produced five loaves and two fish. This is the crowd which is asking for a sign. What do they expect? What would convince them? If the feeding of the five thousand didn't do it, what other sign would?

It's clear from the passage that they believed that their ancestors had received manna in the desert. They believed what they had not witnessed themselves but failed to understand the signs which Jesus had already given them as to who He was.

They knew he had fed the five thousand. They knew he had healed the lame man at the pool. They had heard the testimony of John the Baptist, and in chapter 5, Jesus says that the works that the Father gave him to finish - the very works that He was doing - they testified to the fact that the Father had sent Him and yet still the crowd seeks a sign. At least, they say they are. Jesus is not convinced.

Jesus says they are traipsing after Him, not because of the signs He performs but because He filled their stomachs. **You are looking for me because you ate the loaves and had your fill.** He believes they have come to Him wanting something more specific than just a sign. It would figure because isn't that what many of us do in this day and age. We come to find comfort. We come in search of peace. We come for forgiveness. We come to receive a blessing on our marriage or on our child. None of those things

are wrong but we come to be fed in the moment.

The crowds waited to be fed by Jesus when He fed the five thousand. However, in this passage, when Jesus offers them the bread that gives life to the world, they want that. They want the bread that will end hunger. Jesus says: **Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.**

What they don't understand is that this bread is not something physical. It's not like the manna in the desert. It is not something that will rot. It's not food that will have to be binned because it's past its sell-by date.

It is food that endures to eternal life. It is something spiritual that fills us when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says: **I am the bread of life.** He wants the crowd to come to Him and to be satisfied in the long term not just in the moment and He wants the same for us.

He wants people simply to believe in Him and to know that that is what will satisfy them, that that is what will fill them and that that is what will meet their needs, their long term needs. He wants them simply to believe in Him and they cannot do that.

Physical food is essential to life in this world but it's not enough for life eternal. I would argue it's not enough for this life either because it only meets some of our needs. As John says: **Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.** We need more than the bread that is made from the wheat which is harvested.

I was reading an obituary in the Herald the other day. It's a paper I've had for a wee while but like so many others have never got round to reading. It was the obituary of a pastor from the former East Berlin. He was the pastor who organised Monday night prayer meetings to pray for the end of the Cold War and for the end of the occupation of East Germany. The prayer meetings began small but they grew in number and in size. Eventually about three thousand were attending his meeting. Other Churches also organised Monday evening prayer meetings and eventually those led to the peaceful demonstrations which saw the wall demolished and the reunification of Germany.

Those people filled the Churches in the East for prayer but in some ways, I think they were like the crowd in our reading today. They came with something specific in mind. They wanted something temporal. They wanted what would satisfy them in this life. They wanted freedom. They wanted a change to the regime under which they lived. What they wanted was good.

It was nothing bad but it was for now.

Were they like the crowd who said they were looking for a sign? Maybe, but if they were looking for a sign and if they received it when the wall was demolished and the communists were overthrown, they failed to grasp its significance. They failed to grasp that a sign points beyond itself to something greater, in this instance, the power and the presence of the God to whom they prayed.

Like the crowd, they failed to believe in the one God sent. They failed to see that they needed more than they requested. They failed to see that God had more to offer in the long term. They failed to grasp what was eternal and went for what satisfied in the short term but which in the longer term was not all they expected it to be. However, once they had received what they wanted, once they had received their freedom and the change to the regime, they walked away.

It's quite sad really. As I prepared this sermon, I couldn't help thinking that maybe the German Church missed an opportunity to bring home to the people what God had done for them as a nation. The wall coming down was seen to be the result of people power and only of people power. The power of God, the answered prayer, was forgotten by many.

This is not simply a problem in Germany. It is a problem for us. The story of the ten lepers who are healed tells our story. They come for what they want. They are healed but only one comes back to say thank you. Only one realises who has given him what he asked.

The German Church may have missed an opportunity but the German Church is not alone. Do we not also miss opportunities? People come in smaller numbers to our Churches to have their needs met and once they are satisfied, once they have got what they want, they go away again. They too fail to see that what they receive is transitory. It's for this life only, whereas faith, believing in the one God sent, as opposed to just taking from Him a blessing that He offers, faith, belief is what will endure and what give eternal satisfaction.

When the crowds were fired up in Germany, that was the time for the Church to act but then maybe the message was lost on the crowd as it was in the story we read today.

When we think of our own country and of the energy which was around prior to the Referendum, an energy that was spent on something that again is temporal, I can't help wondering if we have grasped the

message from today's reading. The fact that something is temporal doesn't mean it is unimportant but the question is, do we think it is enough to feed the people with food that spoils, with ideas that will only satisfy us in this life, rather than feeding people with food that endures to eternal life? Where is the energy in our Church to take the message that what we need, above all else, is to believe in the one God has sent, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ?

There were hours and hours spent arguing about what was best for the people of Scotland on both sides of the debate but where was God? Where was the message from today's reading?

Glasgow is proud of its motto. St Mungo is said to have preached a sermon in which he used the words: 'Lord, let Glasgow flourish through the preaching of thy Word and the praising of thy Name.' It became Glasgow's motto but the Victorians cut it short so that the motto is now simply 'Let Glasgow flourish'. God has been forgotten and we wonder why the city and indeed the country and indeed the world in which we live is not flourishing. We want the quick fix. We want what satisfies today and to hang with tomorrow, let alone the rest of eternity. We fail to grasp the message.

I don't know how we change that. I don't know how we get that message across, or how we fire people up to share that message that faith is ultimately all that matters. Our temporal needs, our pains, our hunger, our despair, our loss, all need to be addressed because they matter to us and to God but they will be met through faith. They will be met through faith because faith leads to works. Faith without works is dead.

Our faith will cause us to reach out and meet people's immediate needs but our faith shared and grasped will meet people's long term needs, their eternal needs. Bread alone will not satisfy. It will not last.

If we remember nothing else today, I would hope that each of us would remember Jesus' command to **work for the food that endures to eternal life**. That is the food that Jesus offers us. That is the food that Jesus wishes us to share so that no one goes hungry in this life or the one to come.