

## John 6:35, 41-51

*Jesus proclaims himself as the bread of life, and responds to his critics by comparing the life that he gives to the manna that their ancestors ate in the wilderness – which could not keep them from death. Rather, Jesus, says, he gives life that does not end, and he reveals God to those who are drawn to him.*

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 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 forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Where you come from matters. This third instalment of the Bread of Life discourse is all about Jesus’ origins. You have to add verses 35-40 back into the reading because when it comes to origins, v.38 is key, “for I have come down from heaven” and is the reason for the complaining by the Jewish leaders in v.41. Why does it matter where Jesus comes from? This question is the theological lens through which the exegetical details of this portion of Ch.6 come alive. The premise and promise of Jesus’ origins have been front and centre since the beginning of the Gospel, and in fact, where Jesus comes from is the primary claim of the very first clause, “In the beginning was the Word.” In John, Jesus’ origins are not traced back to Adam as in Luke, or Abraham as in Matthew, but to God, God’s very self, to before the world was created, in the beginning, with God. The complaining in v.41 is the same word in the Septuagint in Exodus 16, but what is the registered complaint? The Jewish leaders connect the dots between vv 32 and 40 and figure out just what Jesus is saying - that he is the bread from heaven. The question about Jesus’ ancestry in v.42 is to make clear whose son Jesus is. V.46 directly recalls 1:18, “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

## COCU51B Readings

This week the Lectionary holds together a variety of disparate elements. In the ongoing saga of David’s Reign we jump forward to the rebellion led by his son Absalom, and to Absalom’s death. Once again, we find David grieving an enemy, although this time he grieves as a father as well. In the Gospel we find Jesus being challenged for saying that he is the bread of life, and claiming that he reveals God, that he offers eternal life to those who come to him, and that his followers will be raised by him at the last day. There is a tremendous strength in Jesus’ response to his critics, even as he proclaims a deeply invitational message. In Paul’s words to the Ephesian Church, some simple, practical guidelines are offered for living together as Christ followers. How we speak to one another and treat one another is significant, because it builds our life together, and reflects the life and grace of God. The Psalm calls on believers to praise God for God’s faithfulness and salvation. What stands out this week is a call to Christ-like behaviour that is lived in the daily routines of our lives. As we celebrate God’s goodness, we are called to reflect and imitate that goodness in Christlike grace, compassion, gentleness, and honesty. We are called to resist evil, but love those who oppose us, even to the point of grieving their demise. This is not just living “what comes naturally,” but is a challenge to embrace forgiveness, love and honesty in a radical, counter-cultural way, and in so doing, allowing God’s life to flow through us to touch and restore our neighbours, our communities and our world. The simple challenge of this week is to believe that choosing to live like Christ - the Bread of Life - each day can have positive consequences for our world.

It doesn’t take much thinking to recognise the benefits of living as Paul describes in our homes and communities. As we follow the Bread of Life and live in ways that bring life to our families, friends, neighbours, strangers, and even enemies, we become little “breads of life” to our world. As we live in ways that extend Christ’s invitation to others, so they begin to find life and compassion, forgiveness and restoration through us. And it starts with the small things like being honest, speaking graciously and being quick to forgive. As these simple daily acts become the habits by which we live, we find ourselves growing to the point where love for our enemies, even to the extent of grief at their suffering, becomes a regular feature of our lives as well. This Christlikeness, lived out daily, then contributes to the compassion, integrity and healing of our small section of the world, and becomes like a pebble dropped in a pond, spreading ripples out into the world. (Source: John van de Laar, *Sacredise*)

## **2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33**

*David commands his military leaders to ensure that his son Absalom is not harmed, but they fail, and Absalom is killed in battle. When David hears the news, he grieves, wishing that he had died instead of his son.*

The king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom. So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword.

Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.

Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, "Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you." The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man." The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The story of the conflict between David and his son Absalom takes up 6 chapters (2 Samuel 13-18) and is full of intrigue and moral failings by both David and Absalom.

*It all started when David's son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. David would not punish Amnon because he was his firstborn, leading Absalom to avenge his half-sister by killing Amnon himself. After Absalom had fled into exile, a wise woman from Tekoa told David a story that convinced him to bring Absalom back. Upon his return Absalom promised people that he would be a more just and righteous king than David, and after 4 years of political counter-counselling, he went to Hebron, David's first capital, and raised an army that forced David to flee Jerusalem and go across the Jordan River to Transjordan. There are many more twists and turns in this fascinating story, including Absalom's public raping of ten of David's concubines to show who was the real king (2 Samuel 16:20-22). The lectionary continues the story this week...*

## **Psalms 130**

*A Psalm of faith and trust in God who forgives sins and whose promises bring hope and redemption to God's people.*

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

**Lord, hear my voice!**

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

**I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God's word I hope;**

my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

**For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with God is great power to redeem.**

It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

## **Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2**

*The apostle instructs the Ephesians believers on how to live as true followers of Christ. He encourages them to be honest with one another, to speak to one another in edifying ways, and to avoid anger, shouting and slander, choosing instead the way of forgiveness and compassion.*

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.