**Dorset South and West Circuit – Written Service – Sunday 27th August 2023**

### *This weeks service comes from Methodist Connexional team, and its part of a series of reflections on John’s Gospel. If you would like to look at the whole series here is the link:* [*Storms and picnics*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/leading-worship/resourcing-local-arrangements/#storms)

Call to worship:

In the breaking of bread we are known and we know, in the eating of bread we are fed for our journey. In the sharing of bread we become one family in giving bread to others we act as God’s people So, as bread and Word are broken, may we receive from God’s hands and each others’ hands and may we give to each other, God and the world that all may be fed, and find life in abundance. Amen

What are we carrying?

*As the crowds that followed Jesus brought their hopes and dreams, joys and sorrows, their struggles and preoccupations. So we come to worship with our minds and memories full of the past week and beyond, and our minds and imaginations already looking to tomorrow and further planning, worrying and hoping. Let us bring all we are, all we have been and all we will be as we offer our prayers to God: our wonder and praise; our recognition of past wrongs; and all that we bring with us.*

Prayer

God of all times and all places and of this time and this place we praise you for the glimpses of your glory we have seen this week for your eternal presence in creation and beyond it, for the times when we’ve been aware of your presence and for those when your love has surrounded us even though we did not recognise it. for all that you are and for all that you have made . . .**we praise you**

God of all times and all places made human in Jesus, in one time and place we praise you for the glimpses of your glory in in Jesus for his life lived among us for his death, resurrection and ascension leading us to abundant life for all that you are

and for all that you have done and are doing . . . **we praise you**

God of all times and all places but beyond time and space we praise you for the glimpses of your glory we are given through your Holy Spirit. As we worship, may that Spirit inspire and guide us that we may worship in spirit and in truth for all that you are for all you will do . . . **we praise you. Amen.**

Prayer of confession

In silence we call to mind our sins (*take a moment to dwell in Silence)*

I confess to God and to you that I have sinned in thought, word and deed; may God have mercy on me. **May God grant you pardon, forgiveness of all your sins, time to amend your life, and the grace and comfort of his Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Reading 2 Samuel 23:13-17:** 13During harvest time, three of the thirty chief warriors came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. 14At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. 15David longed for water and said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!” 16So the three mighty warriors broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord. 17“Far be it from me, Lord, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?” And David would not drink it.

Such were the exploits of the three mighty warriors.

Introduction to the reading

The beautiful hymn to the Word that begins John’s Gospel invites us into the mystery of who Jesus is, asking us first to come and see, to dip our toes into the water’s edge and then enticing us deeper until we are immersed in the life of the Gospel, Jesus and God. This is followed by a trip to Jerusalem where Jesus drives traders from the Temple and has a night time conversation with a Pharisee, Nicodemus on his way back to Galilee Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well and in Galilee he heals an official’s son. Back in Jerusalem he heals a man by the Pool of Bethsaida and has an argument about working on the Sabbath. In our first week we heard the story of Jesus feeding the 5000 in Galilee which finishes with Jesus withdrawing to be alone... then in the second week we read the mysterious story of the night journey across the lake, the storm, and Jesus walking on the water to join the disciples and bring peace.Today we join Jesus on the other side of the lake as we did last week and the week before and continue the debate about the Bread of Life...

Reading John 6:48 – 59: 48I am the bread of life. 49Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. 50But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. 51I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” 52Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. 55For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. 57Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” 59He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Time to Reflect

Take a moment to allow the story to sink in...

If you were to place yourself in the story where would you be?

Would you be a member of the crowd still searching for Jesus so he could give you more bread? Would you be one of the disciples terrified in the boat? How do you feel? What jumps out at you?

Has it ever struck you how strange the things we say at Holy Communion really are? How odd it is to hand someone a piece of bread with the words ‘The body of Christ broken for you’ Or to hand them a cup and expect them to drink from it when told ‘the blood of Christ shed for you’...? At the very beginning of her book, Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion, Sara Miles writes

*“One early morning when I was forty-six, I walked into a church, ate a piece of bread, took a sip of wine. A routine Sunday activity for tens of millions of Americans - except that up until that moment I’d led a thoroughly secular life, at best indifferent to religion, more often appalled by its fundamentalist crusades. This was my first communion. It changed everything. Eating Jesus, as I did that day to my great astonishment, led me against all my expectations to a faith I’d scorned and work I’d never imagined. The mysterious sacrament turned out to be not a symbolic wafer at all but actual food - indeed, the bread of life. In that shocking moment of communion, filled with a deep desire to reach for and become part of a body, I realised that what I’d been doing with my life all along was what I was meant to do: feed people.”*

It is easy, at times, for our experience of Holy Communion to become common place - for us to become so used to it that it becomes a habit and we loose a sense its power and extraordinariness. But even in the midst of the regular practice we can be surprised by its power once more - as the William Cowper hymn says ‘Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings; It is the Lord, who rises with healing in His wings:’ In describing such a moment someone once wrote “I was a student in college. Each day I went into the chapel for morning prayer and Holy Communion. Each day we used the same words, followed the same order, often sat in the same places, next to the same people. The pattern echoed and held us. All was always the same, expected and ordered.

It was the same that morning. The liturgy followed its usual pattern, leading us on in the familiar rhythm. Prayers were said using the same words we’d used countless times before.

The peace had been exchanged and the prayer of Great Thanksgiving echoed around us. There was nothing to suggest anything out of the ordinary. Then came the point when bread is broken - the same wafers as always. The same priest holding up and breaking. And then the shock. It was as if the whole building shook with the force of that crack as the bread broke. As if somehow it had entered

me and pierced me viscerally. I was overwhelmingly aware of the huge import of what we were

doing: my body shook with it.

Could it be this kind of shock of recognition which the disciples experienced at the moment Jesus broke the bread at Emmaus as is shown in today’s picture from the Methodist Modern Art Collection**? In The supper at Emmaus,Roy de Maistre (1894-1968)** paints that moment when the disciples recognise the risen Christ as he breaks the bread at supper.

A painting of a person sitting at a table

Description automatically generated

The light of recognition seems to fill the centre of the canvas drawing us, and the disciples into it.

And yet there is also a feeling of the disciples drawing back and remaining in the darkness of the other two thirds of the scene. As if they are struggling with what has been revealed. In this the picture seems to reflect the disciples feelings on the road as they talked: their despair at Jesus’s death, their bewilderment at the possibility of resurrection.

It also seems to reflect the feelings of the crowd who surround and debate with Jesus: - their longing to be fed and to gain life that we have heard in their request for bread - but also their revolt at the thought of Jesus offering himself as bread of life. And who can blame them? In a culture where all meat is drained of every last drop of blood and washed through with salt so that no blood may be eaten by mistake, the thought of consuming any creature’s blood was repellant and enough to turn stomachs, let alone a man offering his own. These comments of Jesus go against the grain. They are intended to shock us out of the familiar. To set us thinking and feeling. The language Jesus uses is striking, calling on us not merely to take a detached and symbolic nibble but to bite, munch,chew, gnaw on the bread of life.

We are reminded of the barley loaves and dried fish shared as he fed the crowd and the amount of chewing they would have needed before swallowing. This is not pureed baby food that slips down easily. It is a meal that cost God and that will change us in the eating. We heard earlier the story of King David which tells of a time, towards the end of his life, when he is at war with the Philistines who have occupied Bethlehem. In the heat of battle David finds his throat parched and longs for a drink. He gazes at his home town, now a Philistine stronghold and estranged from him, and sighs of

his longing to able to drink from a familiar well within it. On hearing this three of his strongest and bravest men broke through the Philistine army, collected water from the well and brought it back to David. When he received the water 2 Samuel 23:16-17 tells us. But he would not drink of it; he poured it out to the Lord, for he said, ‘The Lord forbid that I should do this. Can I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?’.

So could Jesus’ be asking us to profit from his risking (and losing) his life in the way that David refused to profit from the risk of his men’s lives? Are we ready to feel and to be changed by the full impact of that love and that risk? To open our lives, all that we are to the full reality and wonder of the bread of life.

Prayer of Intercession

God of stormy seas and calm shorelines who heard the cry of your enslaved people

and led them to freedom through a parted sea who heard the cry of your people

in the roar of the storm and brought peace. Hear our prayers … **and let our cries come to you**.

We pray for the needs of this world for those enslaved by fear, terror, war, poverty, hunger, oppression for those crying out for freedom, justice, food for their children and themselves, peace and life in all its fullness. Hear our prayers … **and let our cries come to you**.

We pray for the church throughout the world, for our circuit, & for this church that we may live in God’s life for all who are seeking life in its fullness for all crying out to hear, feel and know God’s love. Hear our prayers … **and let our cries come to you**.

We pray for those who are in need those who are ill and those who care for them and worry about them those who face difficult decisions and those who cannot see a way forward those who are grieving and those who sit with them. Hear our prayers … **and let our cries come to you**. **Amen**

Blessing

As we leave we receive bread, a sign of God’s abundance and plenty to feed us as we live as God’s people in the coming week. Go into the world to feed those who are hungry, weep with those who grieve and bring healing and hope. Go into the world

to see God’s abundant life wherever you go and in whoever you meet and to share God’s abundant life wherever you go and in whoever you meet. And may the blessing of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.