

Dear Friends,

Some time this week you may well make a trip to the supermarket to get your weekly shopping and that will probably include some bread. It will be readily available on the shelf. There will be quite a variety to choose from. You will pay little attention to the price, not realizing that the packaging that the bread is wrapped in probably costs more than the wheat that is in the bread. All in all, you will think it a very uneventful purchase.

It is quite difficult for us, as twenty-first century Europeans, to understand the importance of bread unless we turn on the television and watch what is going on in other parts of the world. When there is not enough to eat there is suffering and famine. A simple loaf of bread: something to which we do not give a second thought, but in certain parts of the world it means life itself.

It is only as we comprehend that situation that we can really begin to understand the importance of bread not only now but also in the time of Jesus. Just think for a moment how many significant theological events in the Bible revolve around the subject of bread. The most important event in the Old Testament was the Exodus, the escape from Egypt to the Promised Land. But what caused the Hebrews to be in Egypt in the first place? It was the lack of bread in their own country. The wheat crop had failed due to drought, and the Hebrews had migrated to the land of Pharaoh because there was a surplus in storage there. It was bread, or the lack of it, that initiated this whole chain of events.

Later, when the Jews were on their way to the Promised Land, and they were facing starvation in the wilderness, God sent down bread from heaven, as it was called, in the form of manna.

When Jesus began his ministry, he went into the desert where he was tempted. As the hot sun burned down on him, he looked out over the round white rocks, and we are told that they took on the appearance of loaves of bread. Satan was tempting Jesus to give bread to the people and earn their support by giving them what they wanted. Yet, Jesus spurned that temptation because, he said, that man cannot live by bread alone.

One day Jesus was praying by the roadside when the disciples walked up and saw him. They were so impressed by the genuineness of his prayer that they implored him: Master, teach us how to pray. It was in the midst of the Master's prayer that he reminds us of the importance of the bread of life. He prayed: Give us this day our daily bread.

We remember how the crowd who listened to Jesus found themselves out in the countryside without any food. Jesus took the bread and the fish and multiplied them so that everyone had enough and there was plenty left over. In John's account Jesus then taught the crowd on the theme of bread. Jesus declared that he is the Bread of Life and that those who come to him will never hunger again.

We shall shortly be coming to Harvest time when we give thanks to God for all that he has given us, the theme of food and particularly bread are very much in our minds. We thank him for the physical food he provides but also for the spiritual food. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Our inward hunger, our spiritual hunger can only be satisfied by the true Bread that is found in Jesus.

With best wishes,

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