

Thursday 9th April 2020 (Maundy Thursday)

Glynde Lutheran Church

Sermon on John 6:35

Theme: "Strength for the journey ahead"

"Let Jesus feed you and strengthen you!"

Introduction:

Can I begin tonight by asking you a question, "Are you good at travelling long distances in the car?" When our boys were younger, we had to do a lot of travelling in the car together, as we returned from Horsham and Geelong to South Australia, and as we went on various holidays all over the east coast of Australia. The long and the short of it all was that we learnt to be good at travelling long distances....

One thing that we discovered, by travelling around here and there, was the importance of food stops. Without regular food stops, you can't drive effectively, or do anything effectively for that matter. When we drove back from Murray Bridge to Geelong, for example, we have a hearty breakfast, which sustained us until lunch, when we had pies and pasties usually from the bakery in Bordertown. We then used to have a break in Horsham for a cuppa and biscuits, maybe, or an icecream, and again in Ballarat for a slurpee from the service station there, and then finally when we get home we have a good tea. When you're travelling, you need regular food stops to give yourself strength for the journey, and to aid in.

And it's the same with most activities in life... You need regular meal times, and the occasional snack or two, to give yourself strength for the activity that you are involved in.

In the same way, we who are God's children through our baptism and our faith in Jesus as our Saviour need regular meal and snack times, so to speak, when we receive strength for the journey ahead. We need to allow Jesus, "the bread of life", to feed us regularly so that we remain strong in our faith as we journey on in life, and so that we have the strength to follow Jesus in the way that we live our life.

And how does Jesus, "the bread of life", feed us? He feeds us through his words, and through his sacrament. Let's spend some time now tonight exploring a little how Jesus feeds us, and what his feeding of us means for our life.

Part 1: Through his Word

Jesus feeds us and strengthens us for our life as God's children in the first instance through his words, which are found in the New Testament *and in particularly in the Gospels*. Jesus' words feed us in two main ways, I think.

1. Firstly, they encourage us in our faith. Through his words to us in the Bible, Jesus reminds us of the precious things that we've learnt over the years from him. He reminds us, for example, that we are loved and valued by God. Nowhere does Jesus do this more powerfully as *I've said many times*, I think, than in his story of the Prodigal Son, *which in the final analysis is a picture of God's love for us*.

I've been reading a little, lately, about a man by the name of Henri Nouwen. He wrote a book entitled *The Return of the Prodigal*, and in this book he meditates on that wonderful scene when the father runs to his returning son, puts his arms around him, hugs him, kisses him, and throws a party for him (*Luke 15:20-24*). Many of us, I know, weren't shown love like this from our parents as we were growing up, *and maybe even in our later life, we've not had an abundance of love like this*. But regardless of how much you or I feel loved by others, we are loved by God and are precious to God.

This we know through Jesus, God's Son, and what he teaches us, and this we know by watching Jesus and the way that He loved and cared for people.

I love the verse from the start of John's Gospel where John writes:
No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known (*John 1:18*).

It is through listening to Jesus, God's Son, and watching him that we discover the heart of God: that God loves and values each one of us. And that's mighty special to know at all times on the journey of life, *and especially right now as we struggle with our fears as a result of the threat of the Corona virus*.

And it is this that we are reminded of again and again as we allow Jesus to feed us with his words: that God is our dear, *Abba*, Father, and that we are loved and valued by Him.

And as we allow Jesus to feed us with his words to us, he also reminds us that he is our Saviour, and that we are God's forgiven children as

we trust in him as our Saviour. Let me read to you just a few of things that Jesus said, and which remind us of this:

- * “**The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will rise to life**” (Mark 8:31).
- * “**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people**” (Mark 10:45; cf. Isa. 53:10-12).
- * “**This is my blood, which seals God’s covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins**” (Matt. 26:28; cf. Jer. 31:31; Isa. 53:12).

By the way, I’m only quoting to you from the Jesus’ words in the Gospels, but I could equally well go on and quote passages from the various letters of Paul and so on (e.g., *I Cor. 15:3; Eph. 1:6,7*). I well remember Dr. Vic Pfitzner at Luther Seminary making the point very strongly that these too are the words of Jesus, *no less than those in Gospels*. They are the words of the risen, exalted Lord Jesus who through his Spirit inspired and led Paul and others as they wrote their books and letters.

So as we allow Jesus to feed us with his words, he reminds us of all the things that we have discovered through meeting him: that we are loved by God; that we have a Saviour, that we are forgiven by God; that we are headed home to be with him and our dear Father in heaven; *and much, much more*.

2. And as we allow Jesus to feed us through his words, Jesus reminds us of how God wants us to live as His children.

I love the Bible reading for tonight for his reason. Here Jesus shows us and tells us what life as God’s child is all about: it’s all about being a loving servant of one another and others. Listen again to what Jesus says:

“You call me Teacher and Lord, and it right that you do so, because that is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another’s feet. I

have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.... And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (*John 13:13-15, 34*).

Through Jesus, God's Son, God guides us in the directions that He wants us to go as His children: God wants us to be loving servants of one another, *just like Jesus was and is*.

I guess it's not so easy to be servants of one another, locked away in our houses for the most part during this Corona Virus pandemic.

But we still can be loving servants of one another and others: we can ring one another, Messenger or Skype one another, drop food or provisions off to one another as we can... (e.g., *David Stock dropping pumpkins and tomatoes and silver beet off to Jenine and myself*).

You know, it's easy to get lost along the journey of life.... For example, it's easy *in these stressful times when we are thinking a lot about our situation* to allow yourself to forget how God wants us to live our life, as His forgiven children. But when we are allowing Jesus to feed us regularly with his words, how can we forget!! Jesus doesn't allow us to forget! ☺

To be fed and strengthened with food, on our journey home from South Australia to Geelong by car, *back in our Victorian days*, we had to do certain things. For example, we had to stop the car, go into the bakery, and buy the pies and pasties. It is the same thing when it comes to being fed with Jesus' words. We have to do certain things, so that we can be fed, *things like*:

- * **opening our Bible and reading it first thing in the morning, or when we are having a cuppa, or at bed time, or whenever**
- * **organise family devotions, and remind one another to spend time at the meal table or wherever letting Jesus speak to us** (e.g., *Lenten devotions, LCA devotions online*).
- * **organise a Bible study groups online** (e.g., *Friday morning group organized by Barb; Young Adults group at Salisbury, organized by our son Jonathan*).

- * having worship together on Sundays using online resources provided at our Glynde church website.

Part 2: Through his Sacrament

Normally, it is not only through his words to us that Jesus feeds us and gives us strength for the journey ahead.... Usually he also feeds us when we come to his table. This is a meal “with” Jesus, our Saviour and our Lord, and a meal at which we feed “on” Jesus.

This is not happening at the moment.... We are not allowed to worship together in our church, and in fact no more than two of us can gather together.... Normally, on Maundy Thursday, the day that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper as a community meal together with him, I’d be talking a lot about this meal, and encouraging you to gather together at this meal as much as possible so that Jesus can feed you....

But there is not much point in doing that tonight.... However, I can get us to look back to when we were celebrating this meal, and to look ahead to the day when we can worship together in this church and gather together at the altar with Jesus and be fed by him.... May that day come soon!

Because it’s Maundy Thursday, though, let’s think about what we have to look forward to, when we come together again to celebrate this meal.... Firstly, this is a meal of us being “with” Jesus. He promises us that he is with us always, even to the end of the age (*Matt. 28:20*). And in this meal, he is with us in a special way. It is “the Lord’s Supper”; it is his meal (*1 Cor. 11:20*). He is the host of the meal, and he invites us to come to his meal, just as he invited his disciples on that first Maundy Thursday to share a meal with him (*Matt. 26:17-19*).

And as we come together to his table, we feed “on” Jesus. Jesus feeds us with himself. He feeds us not just with bread and wine, but with his very body and blood. This is an incredible mystery that we can’t fully understand with our minds. But we believe it to be true, because we believe Jesus’ words when he says:

“This is my body.... This is my blood”
(Matt. 26:27-28; Mark 14:22-24).

And Paul in his letters makes a very close link between the bread and the body of Jesus, and the wine and the blood of Jesus. Listen to a couple of things that he says:

- * “**The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (Greek, “*Koinonia*”) in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”** (1 Cor. 10:16 RSV).
- * “**Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord”** (1 Cor. 11:27 NIV).

And John in his Gospel emphasises that Jesus himself linked the bread and the wine with his body and blood. John *in the chapter that our text for tonight is taken from* records Jesus as saying:

“I am the bread of life.... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:48, 54).

The reality that we believe to be true is that in the Lord’s Supper, our risen, exalted Lord Jesus feeds us with his body and blood (*cf. John 6:51, 53*). We may not be fully able to understand this, but we believe this to be true on the basis of Jesus’ words, and the words that he led and inspired Paul to write, and John to write, and so on....

Conclusion:

Well, back to the illustration that I began with: that of Jenine and the boys and I travelling home by car from Murray Bridge to Geelong *back in our Victorian days*. We needed regular meal and snack times to make the journey.

In the same way, we who are God’s children through our baptism and our faith in Jesus as our Saviour need regular meal and snack times, so to speak, so that we can receive strength for the journey ahead. We need to allow Jesus, “the bread of life”, to feed us regularly so that we remain strong in our faith as we journey on in life, and so that we have the strength to follow Jesus in the way that we live our life.

And Jesus does this through his words, and through his. May God bless us as we allow Jesus, His Son, to feed us regularly with his words and later on with his meal.