

# 'Bread of Life'

Sermon Message by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, St James August 4 2018

Keynote Bible Reading: John 6.24 – 35

1) *Living water*. When some 9 years ago I had opportunity to visit South America, Chile and Argentina in particular, there were a number of places I particularly wanted to visit, including the Atacama Desert. This is designated 'the driest place in the world', and the last significant rainfall was 11,000 years ago, shaping how the land is now. In this arid area surprisingly animals, wild and herded eke out sufficient to live on, one wonders how. This is the land of the llama, alpaca, vicunas and guanaco. As I pondered this it was also to be mindful how humans could live there. Yes there was some water, in streams flowing from under the ground, artesian water and this made for oases in this vast desert of northern Chile.

In this harsh environment I found myself pondering what is necessary for life to exist. Surely *water* is a necessary element. Jesus had spoken to the woman of 'living water'. That's how significant it is for the survival of life as we know it, spiritual and physical.

2) *Bread of life* - And there's more - as we take into account the content of today's Gospel, one would also suggest that humanity needs bread, or something of similar sustenance. One might wonder what are we seeking when we pray in the Lord's Prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Our country has no difficulty in getting sufficient. Yet other countries especially in parts of Africa would surely be intensely praying this phrase. So perhaps our prayer for daily bread is a collective one for humanity's needs. This is especially in times of drought, when the rains fail, and there's increasing desertification of the land. Perhaps an immediate message is that those who have, need to share resources with those who have not. As someone has written – 'ensuring an equitable distribution of wealth derived from the land ultimately serves everyone's interests.'

Thankfully this is happening, as technological developments enable more hybrid crops to grow in dry areas. Furthermore, where there is need for water to sustain life, help in attaining this is surely a responsibility of the First World countries. We can assist too, in our support of non-governmental agencies that are active in this field.

Yet there is something much more sinister is on the horizon, and some are warning of it. One of the purposes for exploration of space was to see if humans could live on another planet. With awareness of climate change, at least to some extent caused by human use of fossil fuels, and exploitation of resources, how long will humanity continue to live and flourish on Planet Earth? Some scientists are suggesting this should spur efforts to seek alternative places for humans to live, pending the future of this Planet. However, deadly radiation out in space is a huge hindrance to such possibility. We live in a unique world of a delicate ecological balance and with a protective shield in the atmosphere.

This aspect of the future of life came home to me on the trip, when stopping off at Easter Island (Isla de Pascua or Rapanui) on the way back to New Zealand. I found it a story of tragedy, and how lessons might be learned from what occurred there over several

hundred years. It is believed Polynesians came to the Island and settled from round 700 AD. Life was good and there were resources on the 24 x 12 km size island. The population grew, and statues of ancestors called moai were constructed from the rock. Then things started to change, resources became increasingly scarce, including wood. The people had a tribal system which led to warring over the resources, and cannibalism. This wasn't helped in the 1800's when slave-traders carried off over 1000 to work in the mines of Peru. Then also visiting ships brought with them diseases from which the islanders had no immunity. So much so, a 'low' was reached in that by 1870 there but 100 native islanders left. Furthermore, whilst its not known for sure, it is likely they turned to their gods and the ancestors, and when no help was somehow forthcoming they toppled the various tribes moai. So, the ones seen today have been re-erected from where they were cast down.

Is this a microcosm for what could happen on this Planet? Could it be that we turn to our God – and it's too late? Humanity has been irresponsible in keeping the stewardship which God said was our responsibility. The concern for our environment has to be taken seriously. What hope for the future? Conservation and sustainability are 'in words'. I note in that context Jesus referred to himself as 'bread *of life*'. So, it does have deeply spiritual as well as practical implications.

3) *Doing the works of God* Now return to the Gospel reading. The dialogue between Jesus and the disciples is around a question, 'What must we be doing to perform the works of God.' Jesus replies, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' How might we connect this with sustainability on the Planet? As one believes in Jesus, one can expect to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had said 'the Holy Spirit will guide you into all the truth.' Could it be that the Holy Spirit is prompting humanity about the need for changing lifestyle to better preserve the resources of earth? From a human point of view, it surely makes sense, for the generations that are to come. From a Christian point of view there is a responsibility to take this seriously. So, what are you doing to help? The proliferation of plastic is one presently getting publicity especially moving from single use plastic bags.

From my reading and on TV I'm conscious about the catching of some fish stocks which are surely going to deplete bluefin tuna, as schools are rounded up and caught. (It may seem a small protest to not buy a small tin or a fillet of fish, but if enough are conscious of this and act on it, we *are* doing something and the effect can be cumulative. Furthermore, I believe that's my Christian duty. It's an action I implement both as human and in my belief in Jesus. Your concerns about sustainability are also surely important and the more who are acting responsibly the better. Who knows, there may come a day when we don't have to pray 'give us this day our daily bread.' But in the nature of humanity at the present that may be a long way off, bearing in mind the gulf between those who have and those who have less.

So, this morning, a challenge may I suggest for all of us. For me it's been a reminder when I've seen what it's like in a desert, and how important water is for life. So also, is bread - 'our daily bread.' Then thinking through implications from what occurred on Easter Island, it brings a sense of urgency.