

Welcome

We are the people of The Word, and we gather this day, to hear words, to pray in words, and to connect with The Word who is all around us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.ⁱ

Song

Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom,
Come to him and bless his name.

Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,
Faithful to the end of days.

*Come then, all you nations,
Sing of your Lord's goodness,
Melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
Praise him with your music,
Worship him and bless his name.*

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,
Risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken,
New life he now gives to all.

Come then, all you nations...

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
Solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
Splendour of the living God.

Come then, all you nations...

Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet,
Praise God with the lute and harp;
Praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing,
Praise God till the end of days.

Come then, all you nations...ⁱⁱ

Prayers & The Lord's Prayer

God of all wisdom, we give you thanks for the times in which we have experienced your wisdom in our lives. Let us be still and gather ourselves in the space. Let us seek to open ourselves out to connect with the Spirit of God who comes amongst us, by some mystery. [Pause] Forgive us for those times where we've failed to recognise your presence and give us the courage to walk away from situations that prevent us and others from receiving all that you have to offer us. Open our eyes to new and exciting ways of being so that all who we encounter, will experience your wisdom and love. Amen.ⁱⁱⁱ We say together the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Introduction to the Theme

Have you ever been seated, enjoying a delicious meal, to then find someone's fork reach across your plate and steal a little food? Maybe they were a good friend and thought it's okay. Maybe it was a relative who had paid for the meal so they thought they could. Maybe you hardly knew them and you thought what a cheeky person they are.

Jesus didn't have his own plate where he found others helping themselves to food. He gave to others, abundantly. He fed people whenever they needed – think of all those stories where he fed thousands of people. He knew they needed to eat and so he provided. When he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, he even made sure she was fed straight away.

But some people thought that's what he was all about: a wandering meal-provider, modern equivalent of Just Eat or Deliveroo. They even backed up their view by saying he was just like Moses – providing manna in the wilderness, a sort of snack found on the ground.

Jesus tells them though. He reminds them he's not just about the food we need to satisfy our physical needs - the food we put into our stomachs. He reminds them that it wasn't Moses who provided in the past, it was God in heaven. And now Jesus provides the bread of life.

This is the food of heaven, the food which satisfies the soul, the food which gives us life in its fullest, the life of God where we become all we're meant to be in this life and beyond.

It's not that Jesus doesn't think we should fill our plates and enjoy the food for our stomachs. He made sure other people's stomachs were full. It's that Jesus also wants us to have life beyond our physical needs. So next time you eat, remember the bread of life from Jesus. For Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."^{iv}

Readings

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him."

Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." **(2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a)**

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

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." **(John 6:24-35)**

Hymn

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore;
Feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain
Whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:

Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield;
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.^v

Reflection

Rev Becki Stennett

“The Case of the Mysteriously Mould Bread”

The videos can be viewed at [Burley Methodist Church Online - YouTube](#) & www.wandamethodists.org.uk

Alternatively, the written text is provided below

Song

From the breaking of the dawn
To the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
That will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.

When I stumble and I sin,
Condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
That in freedom I might live,
So I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
You remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
and I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
you will guide me with your hand
as I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
every work begun in me,
so I'll stand on every promise of your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair;
Love that casts out every fear
As I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
For the Comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.^{vi}

Putting Ourselves in the Story

(You might like to use the video version of this spoken word piece by Becki Stennett, which can be accessed using the same links as those for the Reflection.)

When we pick up this book, let it open in hands, do we expect only to find ancient people in far off lands? Is it ancient wisdom, okay for a time Long past, quaint in prose and rhyme, or does this book – this word – Live in ways we can't always know? Does it give to us new life, these words written long ago?

If these words are only ancient, consigned to a past long dead, we ought perhaps leave them there, or we could delve into it instead, and see that All humanity is written on these pages, the story of God at work throughout the ages and recognise there are no new stories really, but tales repeated often of God's glory, and our attempt to worship, follow, sometimes successfully, and sometimes less so.

When we read the story of King David, the rich man, the poor man and the prophet named Nathan, do we leave it there in history and declare ourselves by some mystery – far beyond, above, such abuse of power and ignorance of the law of love?

Or are we prepared to see ourselves in the writing, as abusers of power, willing to let others suffer in the fighting, to sweep our ill behaviours under the rug. Or to see ourselves – or others – as the abused who becomes a mother, in the line of Jesus: Yes! But so vulnerable nonetheless. As we look into the story and consider it a mirror, do we wonder how David treated her, how we treat others like her?

David couldn't see himself within the story, only sat a while, basking in his kingly glory, until his eyes were opened and he saw the truth in the allegory, saw his behaviour was so terrible, awful, unlawful in the eyes of God, who surely gave David all his might and authority, and who amazingly forgave him so that David might be the king from whose line the Saviour would come.

If we leave the holy tales to simply fade and pale, into a history we've moved on from, then we have forgotten that this work of ages, is our story too, splashed across the pages. It's the story of a people trying to get things right and being reminded, sometimes, that they might just have strayed, forgotten God, hurt others, not lived as sisters and brothers as they should. And for us, who live by the Word of God, there is no new story, there is us, and God, and world which needs to see God's glory, And just might see God's glory if when we pick up this book, let it open in our hands, we begin to understand that we are in these stories. We are on these pages, written in long-past ages. Their story. Our story. Our past and future glory, in a Word which lives, and longs for conversation with us, speaking to us today, if only we can let it.^{vii}

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray. God of all grace, we bring you ourselves. We bring you our lives, as they currently are, with all that is broken and wrong, but also much to be grateful for and to celebrate. Use us, O God, to build your kingdom, to seek peace in our world, to build communities of love.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we bring you our churches, Caught in this strange 'in between' time, as we reflect on the painful experiences of lockdown, and how we can best serve our communities and our world over this summer and into the year ahead. Show us how to create safe spaces, spaces where people can grieve, can find healing, can meet with you and be transformed by your grace.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we bring you our nation, We bring to you all who have been working overtime to see us through this time of crisis, and all who will need to work overtime as we seek to rebuild our communities, our economy, our relationships and our livelihoods. We bring you our leaders and all who must face difficult decisions or face up to inadequacies in our systems exposed by the process of lockdown and pandemic. Show us how to be a people of grace.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we pray for our world. As we look out on a global pandemic, and a world in which we have gone backwards in tackling poverty and reaching those most in need during this time of pandemic, which has affected the most vulnerable in our world more than many of us. As we rebuild, show us how to build a world in which every person's needs are provided for. A world where every person's potential is fulfilled.

May we follow in your way, O God.

May I follow in your way, O God.

Show me what is mine to do.

We bring this, and all our prayers, in Jesus' name, Amen.^{viii}

Song

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord,

If you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?
I will go Lord...

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

I will go Lord...^{ix}

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;

Blessing

Arise from this place and go out into the world. A world of so much division and pain, A world crying out for love, You, each one of you, can be that bit of love for someone this week. Amen.^x

Reflection

Recently, our household experienced what I'd like to call 'The Case of the Mysteriously Mouldy Bread'. A fresh loaf of bread, stored in the bread bin in the kitchen, suddenly, and apparently inexplicably, went mouldy overnight. Initially, as you might imagine, there was a good deal of frustration at the loss of the bread and the need to acquire another loaf before lunchtime. Frustration gave way a little to a desire to find fault: we examined the loaf's packaging, checked the 'best before' date, and scoffed a little about 'dodgy batches'.

It was only a few days later, as I saw my husband carry a (different!) new loaf of bread out of the kitchen and place it onto the dining room table that I realised that he had worked out what had happened. As he carried the loaf of bread from the kitchen, I was popping on the heater under the kitchen cabinets to give a load of drying laundry a little kick start at the end of a rainy day... just as I had done a few days earlier.

I had created the perfect environment for the bread to mould, releasing a lovely damp, warm air into the kitchen in the hope of my laundry drying a little quicker. As eager as I had been to find the fault somewhere, I hadn't stopped to consider that it may have been as a consequence of my own action that the bread had gone mouldy.

Today's lectionary readings speak of bread, and of needing to recognise the consequences of actions, so I hope our unfortunate incident with 'The Case of the Mysteriously Mouldy Bread' may help us to reflect on these accounts, one from the life of King David and the other from the life of Jesus.

Let's turn then to our first passage, from 2 Samuel chapter 11 verse 26 to chapter 12 verse 13a. It's not an easy part of David's story that we pick up here. King David, the golden boy, has taken another man's wife, Bathsheba, to bed and she is pregnant. Her husband, Uriah, is one of the military men under David's command, and David has chosen to send Uriah to a particularly dangerous battlefield in the hope that Uriah will die in battle before he discovers the betrayal and pregnancy. Uriah does indeed die in the fighting, and perhaps David breathes a sigh of relief: he won't be caught out.

As you might expect, this behaviour offends and angers God. God sends the prophet, Nathan, to speak with David, and Nathan approaches the King and tells him the story of the rich man and the poor man.

As Nathan speaks, David's anger burns against the fictional rich man who abuses his power and takes the precious ewe lamb from the poor man. He is quick to express how awful he considers this behaviour to be, and how harsh the punishment ought to be for the rich man. He fails, though, to see that he himself is the rich man in his own story. David took from Uriah what was so precious to this man who had not much, abusing the great deal of power and wealth that he himself had, and yet struggles at first to identify his own behaviour in the allegory Nathan tells. When Nathan reveals the truth to him, David is confronted with the reality of his own judgement, and indeed that of God's too.

There are clear lessons for us to learn from this story about honesty, integrity, fidelity and the right use of power and authority. But perhaps there is also a great lesson for us to learn here about how we situate ourselves in the stories of our faith. David was told a story from which it was intended he would learn. Scripture is the word of God given to us, that we might learn more about God and more about ourselves.

When you read this story from 2 Samuel, do you instinctively try to situate yourself in the story, as one of the main characters? Does the character of Nathan resonate well with you, or that of Bathsheba or Uriah or one of the fictional characters from the story Nathan tells? Or do you feel yourself confronted by King David in his darkest hours? How ready am I, are we, to acknowledge that sometimes our behaviour most closely matches the wrong doer in the parts of Scripture which are tough to tackle? I imagine I'm not writing to many kings who have had soldiers killed to cover infidelity, but I expect a good number of us have been guilty of a good many acts we would criticise in others, and share the story of a privileged person using their power and authority in ways which contradict the law of love. When we do that, we take from the more vulnerable the things precious to them which are incidental, disposable, taken for granted by those of us who have more. We need to ask ourselves as individuals if we are guilty of this, and we need, too, to ask when we have been guilty of this as Church. Because even if we can't personally identify with the most vulnerable in the story, others would, and sometimes we have been the ones to cause pain.

Like David confronted by Nathan's words, are we ready to be confronted with the devastating reality that we have done things that have hurt others and displeased God?

The good news is that David repents, is forgiven, and he is still the famed King David of whose line Jesus is born. When we recognise and repent of our sins, however grave, we find in God a forgiveness we can hardly begin to comprehend.

How can we respond to forgiveness and faithfulness from God when we so often make mistakes?

Jesus' disciples ask the pertinent question in John 6, verse 28: 'What must we do, to do the work God requires?', and surely this is the most important question. 'What can we do, for God who has done so much for us?'

And Jesus responds 'This is the work of God: to believe in the one he has sent.' There is no work we can do perfectly, but we can believe. We will make mistakes, get things wrong, sometimes in the full knowledge that what we're doing is not right. Sometimes we will work hard to do what we believe God wants, and sometimes we'll knowingly turn away. Often we'll get it a bit wrong however well-intentioned we are.

But if we believe in the one whom God sent, we believe in a faithfulness beyond any we could begin to demonstrate. We believe in a bread that will sustain our living and loving, that will never stop feeding us.

God who provided manna in the desert gives to us, in Jesus, a bread that doesn't disappear overnight, or that goes mouldy and becomes useless when we create the conditions to make it spoil. Christ is the bread of life who will continue to feed us when we get things right, and when we get it wrong. There is nothing that can separate us from Christ's love and faithfulness to us.

When we read the stories of God through the Bible, are we ready to make ourselves vulnerable, ready to see mirrored back to us our own vulnerabilities or wrong behaviours? And when we do that, are we ready to turn, repentant, and find the outrageous, wonderful presence of Christ sustaining us for ever? When we break bread, are we ready to receive and accept that we are indeed the broken body of Christ, pointing always to the bread that will never spoil or run out?

Who are we, when we read the stories? Whichever character we are, we are always the people who believe in the one whom God sends. And that's enough.

ⁱ Written by Tim Baker

ⁱⁱ Words by Ernest Sands, 1981, Ernest Sands. StF 65.

ⁱⁱⁱ Written by Ramona Samuel

^{iv} Written by Gary Hopkins

^v Words by William Williams, StF 465.

^{vi} Words and Music by Keith Getty & Stuart Townend, 2005, Thankyou Music. StF 156.

^{vii} Written by Becki Stennett

^{viii} Written by Tim Baker

^{ix} Words & Music by Daniel L Schutte, OCP Publications. StF 663

^x Written by Tim Baker

Burley in Wharfedale Methodist Church CCLI. 12475