Stowe 4/8/24 John 6: 24-35 ‘I am the bread of life’

This reading comes directly after Jesus has fed the five thousand and walked on water – 2 amazing miracles that show Jesus is the Son of God. And crowds of people are following him, including as we heard sailing in boats to find him.

And when they do find Him Jesus challenges them by saying that they are following Him because he has given them a free meal, because the feeding of the five thousand meant they were all fed for free. Instead, says Jesus, they need to work for food that nourishes your soul.

In Isaiah 55 God says ‘Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and you labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me, listen that you may live’ God through Isaiah is issuing an open invitation to everyone, an offer of salvation, forgiveness and life to the full – He is offering nourishment and sustenance for the soul. And in John 6 Jesus is challenging the crowd to think of the same things – their souls and what their souls need. And this message is as relevant today as it was then, our materialistic world does not prioritise the needs of our souls, although perhaps we are beginning to understand more about mental health and well being – and here Jesus is telling us exactly what we need – Him. Listen that you may live.

Jesus goes on to explain that on Him, on Jesus, God has placed his seal of approval. Now this is an expression that we use today ‘seal of approval’ but it had a deeper meaning at that time. People then did not sign documents etc but put their seal on them – we may think of imprints made in wax but in New Testament times they were imprints, often very elaborate imprints, made on clay. And it was the seal that validated the document or item. Rabbi’s believed that the ‘seal of God’ is truth, and the Jewish crowd would have known this too. So Jesus is saying not only that He is approved by God but that He, Jesus, is Gods truth. And that is why He can offer us nourishment for the soul – because He brings and IS God’s truth.

The crowd reply ‘what we must we do to work for this nourishment’, perhaps they mistakenly think they can somehow earn it with good works. But Jesus corrects them saying they must believe in the one God sent, ie they must believe in Jesus, their Messiah. St Paul tells us that what God desires from us is FAITH. To believe and live in relationship with Him – trusting and obeying Him, and this relationship is made possible because of Jesus and His sacrifice for us.

Jesus has claimed to be their Messiah which must have surprised and shocked some of the crowd – in fact we read a little further on in John 6 that some of his disciples left him after this. And so the crowd challenge Him back on this statement asking for a sign and saying that Moses fed the Israelites manna from heaven – the implication is that Manna is so much better than the loaves and fishes, ordinary food if you like, that Jesus has recently fed them with. And Jesus answers them, firstly reminding them that it was God who fed the Israelites in the time of Moses, and secondly saying that the true bread from God, better than Manna, has come from heaven to give life to the world. Jesus is talking about more than physical hunger but spiritual nourishment and life to the full.

Then Jesus says the famous words ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’ And by breaking it down we can see that Jesus is summarising what He has already said:

Bread/food is necessary for life. We need to eat to live. But God wants so much more for us than existence, He wants life and life to the full. And we can have that life by living in relationship with God by trusting, obeying and loving Him. And Jesus’ death and resurrection brings us the chance, the offer of that relationship because no one can come to the Father except through the Son. So believing in Jesus and following Him is essential for us to live the life God intended and wants for us.

Jesus’ offer of forgiveness and a new life with God nourishes our souls by enabling relationship with Him. For when we live in relationship and listen to Him God guides us and helps us AND LOVES US. And knowing Him and feeling his love brings joy, peace and hope. My prayer for the peoples of the world is that they may ‘Listen to Jesus, the bread of life that they may live’