

**Sermon: 1 August 2021, Bread from Heaven** Exo 16: 2-4, 9-15; Eph 4: 1-16; Jn 6: 24-35

***May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.***

I love that little piece from Mat 2, that we often say around Christmas time *“Wise men/folk still seek Jesus.”* But while that is certainly true ... is it enough? Is it even the most important thing?

At the beginning of today’s passage, the crowd is struggling to keep up with the constantly mobile Jesus and His band of disciples; one minute in Capernaum, the next in Bethsaida, then Capernaum again, or is it Tiberias? Back and forth across the northern and western parts of the Lake, in the region of Zebulun and Naphthali, where there were plenty of non-observant Jews and Gentiles, “the lost”, and others needing to be saved. We might recall that damned elusive Pimpernell ... *“they seek Him here, they seek Him there, those Frenchies seek Him everywhere.”* But is this part of John’s gospel more about what Jesus did, and where ... or is it something else?

For sure, the crowd are more interested in what He did and can do in the moment; feed them, heal them, raise their hopes. But in responding to their clamour Jesus doesn’t answer them directly. Instead, He points to the heart of the theological matter not the practical and mundane: *“You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”* And then the real meat of the meal: *“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures ... which the Son of Man will give you ... it’s on Him that God the Father has set His seal.”* In other words, don’t worry about the bread I gave you yesterday ... *believe in, have faith in, follow, obey Me!*

John’s gospel more than any of the others draws an intimate connection between Jesus and Moses; between the OT prophecies and the person of Jesus.

Moses rescued the twelve tribes from slavery in Egypt; Jesus rescues all the faithful everywhere from slavery and sin forever.

The dialogue here shows the disparity between what the people are seeing or seeking, and what Jesus is offering. *“What must we do? This is the work of God ... believe in Him who He has sent ... Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness ... it was not Moses who gave them bread from heaven ... the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* Wise folk still seek Jesus ... and believe in Who He is.

This is the case in any number of contexts. Earlier this week I was discussing our “Country Liturgy” with a couple of interested parties. That liturgy has many attractions to people who see beauty in all of God’s creation and want to give thanks in a particular way. Nothing wrong with that. The words and imagery in that liturgy quite rightly see God in everything and encourage us to notice Him in everything *around us* ... again, what’s wrong with that? Well, perhaps nothing ... until we ask *Who’s creation is it* and who is in the centre? I’m quite sure that what I consider to be a shift of focus from God to us *at the centre* isn’t intentional, but we need to be careful what words and ideas we use, because they are the vectors by which other folk hear, and then think and do. If we want people to see Jesus, the Son of Man *at the centre* of all hope and belief ... we need to leave Him there. John’s term *the Son of Man* recognises Jesus as both a vulnerable human figure, and as Israel personified ... not the nation of Israel as described politically today, but the true Israel ... that which is associated with God’s heavenly presence ... the power by which He brings life to everyone forever.

This gospel passage then is not about what Jesus does, but about *who He is*. It's an update to the whole way of things; version 2.0 if you like. Can you imagine not taking the latest version of MicroSoft's operating system as soon as it arrives, with all its promises of improvements and cybersecurity protection? This change though, is more of a complete shift away from MicroSoft to Apple or Linux. There is a whole new demand on the people of God from this point forward; it requires a fundamental change of heart and approach in the way we run our lives. If you are looking for salvation, that's not the way ... *this is!* Don't think, or say, or do that ... *believe, have faith, obey*. Until you do, you will forever be misaligned ... you may well have all the bread and fish you can eat, but *the hunger* in you will never be satisfied.

The OT references here point out that it's not the Word that's wrong, it's the way we've been reading it. In His engagement with the people on the beach Jesus tells them that *the sign* they're looking for is standing right in front of them. Moses, whom they credit with feeding the tribes manna in the wilderness, was only God's agent for that moment ... Jesus is the answer to every question they will ever have again. Let's go back to the question the people on the beach asked: "What must we do to perform the works of God?" *Believe in Jesus, have faith, obey*. Do you think they understood that? Do you?

This is the first of John's seven "I am" sayings and this one's so important that it's repeated twice more next week, but we'll get to that. These sayings reveal to us that it's not always about "the what, or the why". Here, it's all about "the who" ... no, not Roger Daltry, Keith Moon, and Pete Townsend, but Jesus ... the Son of Man, the answer to all our questions, the centre of all our being and reasoning, forever. *Faith* is not a thing ... it's not something we do. *Faith* isn't even the opposite of works ... it's an acceptance, a receiving of what God

has offered. *Believe, have faith, obey.*  
**Amen.**