

The True Bread

Invocation:

Dear Father of all, we are glad to know the freedom to come to you, which you have granted to us as a special privilege, because we come to you in the name of your righteous Son. For that privilege we are very grateful, and today we ask for your Spirit to lead us in our worship, and to continue your work of maturing us to make us fit for your eternal presence. We ask this in our Saviour's name, Amen.

1st hymn: by Emily S Elliot (T Margaret, T.R. Matthews 1826-1910)

1. Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown, when Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room for Thy holy nativity:
O come to my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee.
2. Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang proclaiming Thy royal decree;
But of lowly birth cam'st Thou, Lord, on earth, and in great humility:
O come to my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee.
3. Thou camest, O Lord with the living world that should set Thy people free;
But with mocking scorn and with crown of thorn they bore Thee to calvary:
O come to my heart Lord Jesus, Thy cross is my only plea.
4. When heaven's arches ring, and her choirs shall sing at Thy coming to victory,
Let Thy voice call me home, saying: Yet there is room, there is room at my side for Thee!
And my heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus, when Thou comest and callest for me.

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Readings:

- Ps 132:11-18
- John 6:35-59

Prayers:

Dear Father, We are grateful for the good autumn and early winter rains in a year when the predictions are for a drier year. Truly we need to look to you, and trust you, rather than weather forecasts, for they are at best human endeavours. We acknowledge that our very lives are in your hand, and that everything in life comes from your abundant hand. We thank you for our very lives and all we have for everything comes to us as your gift. We thank you also for this land and for the countless good things you give us in our lives here – it is too easy to take all these things for granted.

But we pray for our leaders, thanking you for them, but asking that you will help them make wise and discerning choices as they decide many things on our behalf. Keep them from rash decision-making, and guide them whether or not they are truly conscious of that guidance.

And we pray for your world, so much of it in troubles of their own making so often, for we see there the outworking of human problems such as greed and self-

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centredness. We have often prayed for Ukraine, and we do so again, not really understanding the “why” of many of the decisions taken, but only aware of the cost in distress and loss of life to the people of that land. We thank you that many of them believe in you, and we ask that they be enabled to trust you more and look to you to strengthen them and deliver them from their aggressive neighbour. And if it be possible Father, and we believe all things are possible with you, please stop the war and the abuse of human lives, both Ukrainian and Russian, and let there be peace, by whatever means you determine.

And we pray for true peace in this world, which we see can probably only come via the rule of the Prince of peace himself. And so we pray as many have before, come, Lord Jesus.

And we pray all these prayers in the name of our Saviour, Jesus, the Christ.

Amen.

2nd Hymn: by Matthew Bridges 1800-94 (T Diademata, G.J.Elvey 1863-93)

1. Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne
Hark how the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own:
Awake my soul and sing of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King throughout eternity.
2. Crown Him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife for those He came to save,
His glories now we sing who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring, and lives that death may die.
3. Crown Him the Lord of peace, whose power a sceptre sways
From pole to pole, that wars may cease and all be prayer and praise;
His reign shall know no end, and round His pierced feet
Fair flowers of paradise extend their fragrance ever sweet.
4. Crown Him the Lord of love: behold His hands and side,
Those wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified:
All hail, Redeemer, hail! for Thou hast died for me:
Thy praise and glory shall not fail throughout eternity.

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Message: The True Bread

The feeding of the 5000 is one of the best-known miracles in the ministry of Jesus. John calls it a *sign*, as he does a number of miracles. For of course there were 5000 men (plus many others), and only 5 small barley loaves and 2 fish available to feed them all.

After the miracle, 12 baskets of pieces were picked up from what remained!

After this some claimed he was “the Prophet who was to come into the world”.

The next day when people found him again, he perceived their eagerness, but also their *materialism*. He said “You seek me not because you saw signs, but because you had your fill of the loaves. There is consumer-ism in today’s followers of Christ

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too. Some come to him more because he supplies their needs, not because he is the Lord. Some churches even use this as a growth strategy. It works too! In building numbers at least.

Jesus was always looking for *real faith* in the hearers, so here he chides them for their material-seeking. “Do not labour for the food that perishes, but the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give you, for on him has the Father set his seal.”

Then comes another expose of their motives “What must we be doing to be doing the works of God”? And Jesus said “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (There is nothing that we can do of ourselves which will achieve the work of God. It has been done – can only be done – by God himself. We can only accept it, by believing in him and his finished work. So we see that they did not understand him. And it was to get worse! “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you. What work do you perform?” Jesus had just done an amazing miracle, in multiplying a small amount of food many thousand-fold in an instant. Then while the event was still fresh in their minds, they were asking for a sign. It was no wonder that Jesus said later “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign...” for they had missed the sign. For a sign points to the truth, it is *sign*-ificant. They were meant to be able to read it But they had missed it. They had sought a false sign in an idolatrous way – merely a wonder. They had seen the wonder but missed the sign.

Even the disciples had missed the true significance of the event. (In Mark 8:14- after the same event, they were arguing over bread, and at that stage Jesus rebuked them for their failure to understand.) Here in their midst was the very Bread of heaven but they could not see whom he was. They had been speaking of the bread Moses had distributed to them in the wilderness. And Jesus had pointed out to them that it was really the Father who had given them the bread, and while miraculous it was still earthly. “For the true Bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They did not understand, but they said “Give us this bread always”.

Then Jesus became quite explicit. “*I am the Bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes on me shall never thirst*”. This was a metaphor which they still missed. If this Bread were accepted and believed in, that person would be satisfied and find perfect rest and fulfilment. (Even as he said to the woman of Samaria whom he asked for water, “the water I will give you will become a spring, welling up into eternal life”.)

Jesus went on “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the Bread which comes down from heaven that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh!” He was to shock them even further. While the Jews were still disputing this statement, he continued –

“Truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as our fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.” Of

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course he was using a metaphor, an analogy. He was not inviting them to cannibalism. Then many when they heard this said “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” Here John tells us many of his disciples (he had thousands at one stage) drew back and no longer went about with him.

Are we entirely surprised. We who have believed for years can still hear how strange these words would have sounded to them, how hard would they find these words for the first time? Jesus states here that he knew those who would not believe him, even who it was who would betray him. And he also said no-one could come to him unless it was granted him by the Father. It was a real parting of the ways for many of them. It was at this point in John’s gospel that Jesus said to the twelve “Do you also wish to go away?” I think he would have asked that question rather sadly. Was he also to lose his twelve chosen followers? It was Peter who answered “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

It was John who recorded his “signs” of Jesus, so that people would work out their significance – their *sign*-ificance, and as a result believe on Jesus (as the Amplified version puts it – “cling to, trust in, rely on” him).

- Matthew uses the word “believe” 10 times
- Mark uses the word 10 times
- Luke uses the word 9 times
- John uses the word 99 times!

This makes a point about the quality Jesus was looking for in his disciples. He wanted them to believe in him and also in his Father; he as the revelation from the Father. So he was keen to see this level of practical belief.

He rejoiced to see it (Lk 10:21)

He exposed the faith in the woman with the chronic haemorrhage who touched his robe. She had told herself “If I touch even the hem of his garment, I will be healed. But he had felt it, and pointed it out “Who touched me?” She had already been healed – she felt it. Why did anyone else need to know? Would that not have embarrassed her? But I think he wanted to commend her faith.

He invoked faith in the man with the withered hand. He said “Stretch forth your hand!” He could have said “I would but it is paralysed.” Instead he just obeyed and stretched out that which was paralysed, and *as he obeyed* the will of God was done – it was healed.

He marvelled on 2 occasions according to the RSV:

Read Mark 6:1-6, especially verse 6.

And Luke 7: 1-7, especially verse 9. To complete the story he stopped and turned around, and said to the multitude following him (probably most of them Jews) “I tell you not even in all Israel have I found such faith.” You would realise that Romans usually believed in a multiplicity of gods – they were usually pagans!

And when the Centurion returned home, he found his slave well (Lk 7:1-10).

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The point is – it was *faith* which caused him to *marvel* in both cases. In the first the absence of it, in the second the amazing level of it.

Jesus rebuked Peter when he took his eyes off him while he was walking on the sea in obedience to Jesus who said “Come to me”. While obeying, he could do the impossible, when he looked around at the wind and the waves, he sank. Jesus lifted him up in response to Peter’s cry for help, and said “O man of *little faith*, why did you doubt?” He said exactly the same to the disciples in the storm on the sea of Galilee. At another stage he was in the storm on the same lake: the disciples were all terrified, but Jesus was asleep on a cushion. That is how worried he was. And when woken with “Don’t you care that we perish?” he said “Why are you afraid – have you no faith.”

Jesus gave a prayer to his disciples “Give us this day our daily bread.” He taught them not to be anxious about their physical resources – that birds and lilies didn’t, and God provided for them. Would he not much more provide for You, said Jesus “O ye of *little faith!*”

But after his request that believers in him *partake of his very life*, many said “This is a hard saying, who can listen to it. And the number of his followers dwindled. (Don’t judge the authenticity of a movement by the number of followers it has.) At the really crucial moment for Jesus, all forsook him and fled.

In the world of popularity, of cheap flashy entertainment, the world of quick answers and gaudy advertising, these groups are crawling with members. But remember Jesus said “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matt 7:13-14)

We might say that the Christian answer is not hard, but it is certainly not popular. You would join a dwindling movement today.

And in terms of mere numbers of loyal followers, Jesus was a failure.

But his followers are guaranteed adequate clothing – a robe of righteous-ness (His), God’s gift to them. And an Infallible Guide, the very Spirit of Jesus and the Father, who will guide them into all the truth. And effective weapons of warfare (it is, after all, a *war*), spiritual weapons both offensive and defensive. You need no others. And such as follow him will hunger and thirst no more – He is the Bread of life, and His is the well of living water springing up into eternal life and constantly supplied. They will be fulfilled. This is the *only ultimate security* of our lives. Amen.

3rd Hymn (T Londonerry Air Ancient music of Ireland 1855)

1. I cannot tell why He who angels worship should set His love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers
to bring them back, they know not how or when
But this I know, that he was born of Mary, when Bethl’ems manger was his only home,
And that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world is come.

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2. I cannot tell how silently he suffered as with His peace He graced this place of tears,
Or how His heart upon the Cross was broken, the crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted, and stays our sin and claims our lurking fear
And lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world is here.
3. I cannot tell how He will win the nations, how He will claim His earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations of East and West, of sinner and of sage,
But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory, and He shall reap the harvest He has sown,
And some glad day His sun shall shine in splendour
when He the Saviour, Saviour of the world is known.
4. I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship when at His bidding every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation when all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth will answer
“At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world is King!

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Benediction:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
And the love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Amen.

[This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh \(M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.\) for HopeNet SA](#)