

**Christchurch Methodist Church**  
**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021 - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent**  
**Order of Service**

**Welcome** to this week's worship, whether you are using this worship sheet or joining in the streamed service on Zoom. On this third Sunday in Lent, we return to Jesus the bread of life as we continue looking at John's Gospel, chapter six, and journey with Jesus to Jerusalem.

We use this service, knowing that we are coming into the presence of God with the Church family. Let us spend a few moments in quiet, as we prepare ourselves for worship. Maybe light a candle, or gaze in wonder at a flower or at what you can see out the window, knowing that God sees you preparing for worship and focusing on him.

**Call to worship** – Psalm 5:1-3, 11-12

Let us join with those who have gone before us in the ancient words of the Psalmist,

Listen to my words, Lord,  
consider my lament.

<sup>2</sup> Hear my cry for help,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.

<sup>3</sup> In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice;  
in the morning I lay my requests before you  
and wait expectantly.

<sup>11</sup> But let all who take refuge in you be glad;  
let them ever sing for joy.

Spread your protection over them,  
that those who love your name may rejoice in you.

<sup>12</sup> Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous;  
you surround them with your favour as with a shield.

**HYMN - Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words**

**“With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing” StF 17**

**<https://youtu.be/frzCyXiNeBc>**

## Prayers

Dear loving, heavenly Father,  
We come with gladness to worship you,  
to sing our praises and give you the glory that is yours.  
We come in awe of your love and mercy  
longing to draw close to you.

Thank you, Father, for creating the world and  
loving it so much  
that you sent us your only Son,  
so that whoever believes in him will not perish  
but have eternal life....

Dear Lord Jesus, we thank you for coming to earth  
and living amongst us.  
For showing us the Father's love  
for each and every one of us.  
We know that your love for us  
is deeper than the deepest ocean  
and higher than the highest mountain.  
It is greater than our imaginations....

Please forgive us our sins  
and everything which separates us from you....

Thank you for the knowledge that we are forgiven  
and help us to remember,  
every time we eat the bread and drink the wine,  
how you suffered and died on the cross for us.  
Thank you, Jesus.

Holy Spirit, thank you for dwelling within us,  
For giving us the peace and assurance  
that we are forgiven and set free.  
Help us to know when you are prompting us,  
how you are guiding us and trust in you.  
Thank you for filling us your peace, love and joy....

We bring these prayers in the precious name of Jesus,  
who taught us when we pray to say:

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be Your name,  
Your Kingdom come,**

**Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours,  
now and for ever. Amen**

**Old Testament Reading** – Hosea 11:1-4

‘When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.  
<sup>2</sup> But the more they were called,  
the more they went away from me.  
They sacrificed to the Baals  
and they burned incense to images.  
<sup>3</sup> It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
taking them by the arms;  
but they did not realize  
it was I who healed them.  
<sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with ties of love.  
To them I was like one who lifts  
a little child to the cheek,  
and I bent down to feed them.

**The Epistle** – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ <sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

**Anthem** - “Eat this bread” - <https://youtu.be/rBmn6cdAnO0>

**The GOSPEL** - John 6:41-59

At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ <sup>42</sup> They said, ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, “I came down from heaven”?’

<sup>43</sup> 'Stop grumbling among yourselves,' Jesus answered. <sup>44</sup> 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God." [a] Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. <sup>46</sup> No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. <sup>50</sup> But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

<sup>52</sup> Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'

<sup>53</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. <sup>56</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live for ever.' <sup>59</sup> He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

**Hymn – Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words**

**"In a byre near Bethlehem" (StF 324)**

<https://youtu.be/vlBAWo27U2I>

## Reflection – Complaints and Scars

Years ago in Newton Abbot, back in my legal days, I once represented a couple of lads who had been to a music festival in Cornwall. Whilst hitching their way home, they had been stopped by the police and found to be in possession of cannabis. I saw them a few moments before their appearance in the local Magistrates' Court. They knew that they had to plead guilty, but they wanted me to represent them in court. They told me that they thought that smoking cannabis was less harmful than smoking tobacco or drinking alcohol. They instructed me to say this as part of their plea in mitigation. So, when I spoke on their behalf, I said that "my clients are of the opinion that smoking cannabis is less harmful than smoking tobacco". The next day, a Westcountry newspaper reported that Mr Skinner, for the defendants, said that "smoking cannabis is less harmful than smoking tobacco". Some thought it hilarious, especially my Minister, but when I next telephoned home, I

discovered that numerous family members had read the article and contacted my parents complaining that I supported the taking of illegal drugs! I quickly put them right, and grumbled about the reporting and the media.

I reacted to the grumbling by going on the defensive, but Jesus takes the complaining of the Jews as an opportunity to develop his teaching. There has already been a discussion about the manna received in the wilderness and the grumbling reminds us again of the wanderings in the wilderness and the significance of what is going on here. The Jews, who now represent Jesus' opponents, are muttering not because Jesus has said that he is the bread of life, but that he has come down from heaven. They are wondering how can this possibly be right as God is in heaven and he is the only one who can come from heaven? In their view it is blasphemy of the highest order, and anyway, they argue, Jesus cannot possibly have come from heaven as they know his parents. He is Joseph and Mary's son!

This makes me realize that when people grumble or complain, rather than being defensive or avoiding the, we should regard such times as opportunities to deepen relationships.

Jesus does not answer the question raised by the Jews, but goes to the heart of the matter. If Jesus is only Joseph and Mary's son, of human origin, then people will soon lose interest in him. Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me," (John 6:44). People are drawn to Jesus by God when they see the power of his love lived out in Jesus. When they see that he is more than just Joseph and Mary's son.

The prophet Hosea's task, in the Eighth Century BC, was to call the people of the Northern part of Israel to repentance and to turn back to God. Many of the people were worshipping other gods and Hosea warns them of the disastrous consequences if they do not repent. Hosea also talks about how much God loves them and is saddened by their turning away from him. God loves Israel, whom he led out of Egypt and called his son. Hosea says that God "led them with cords of human kindness,  
with ties of love.

To them I was like one who lifts  
a little child to the cheek,  
and I bent down to feed them". (Hosea 11:4).

God has "drawn" us with cords of love. Jesus continues by quoting Isaiah 54:13, "And they shall all be taught by God". When Isaiah was speaking, in the Sixth Century BC, the Jews were in exile in Babylon and so this is a great prophecy of renewal when God's amazing love will draw his people out of exile back to the Promised land. They were powerless away from their home land and had to rely totally on God. The prophecy goes on to invite everyone who is thirsty to come and drink freely, (Isaiah 55:1), just as Jesus

promised that whoever believes in him will never be thirsty, (John 6:35). The people needed God to rescue them from exile and they needed God to quench their spiritual thirst, as other gods would never satisfy their needs.

It is when we realise our helplessness and need of God that we come humbly to him. In the same way we come humbly to Jesus, trusting in him, drawn by his love, knowing that he has been sent from heaven by the Father out of his great love for the world. I remember the first time that it really struck me how much God loved me and I knew that I could trust him. It was at a Maundy Thursday Circuit Service and when the preacher asked for people to come to the front for prayer, I found myself half down the aisle before I knew what was happening! Before that, I knew that God loved me in my head, but that night I knew it in my heart as well. I wonder what drew you to Jesus when you first decided to follow him and what still draws you to Jesus. It would be lovely to hear each others' stories.

Everyone who comes to Jesus is welcomed by him and this challenges us to love and welcome everyone who comes to us as individuals and as a church.

God has taken the initiative and sent Jesus, the true bread from heaven. God sent the manna to stop the people complaining in the wilderness, but they still died, (John 6:49). Jesus, in response to the grumbling of the Jews, tells them that he is now "the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh".

At the beginning of Chris Cleave's book, "The Other Hand"<sup>1</sup>, the narrator gets the reader to "see all scars as beauty...because...a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means 'I survived'", (p.13f). The narrator continues, "Sad words are just another beauty. A sad story means, this storyteller is alive", (p.14). It is a great book, but I am not going to say any more and make any spoilers!

These words came to mind, as I was reflecting on Jesus talking to the Jews about his flesh and blood. His blood flowed from the wounds caused by his flogging and cruel death on the cross. The wounds would form scars and be important after his resurrection when Jesus invited Thomas to place his hand on the scars of the nails in his hands and the spear in his side, (John 20:24-29). We then see Jesus' scars as beauty as they represent the overwhelming and wonderful love which Jesus has for each and every one of us. A love which knows no limits and led to Jesus' flesh being nailed to the cross and to the shedding of his blood to make us holy and give us life. Through his death comes forgiveness, (Romans 8:8-9, Hebrews 9:12, 14, 22, 26; 13:12), and everlasting life.

Jesus tells us that the “bread that (he) will give for the life of the world is (his) flesh”. He doesn't say “body”, but “flesh” which takes us back to the very beginning of the gospel when John tells us that “the word became flesh and lived amongst us”, (John 1:14). Jesus is the bread that came down from heaven and we need to eat his flesh and drink his blood to have eternal life and he will raise us up on the last day, (John 6:54). How do we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the bread from heaven, Jesus?

John reports that Jesus shared the festival of the Passover with those whom he loved to the end, (John 13:1-2). The Passover supper, of course, recalls the exodus from Egypt. It involves giving thanks to God, as Jesus did before feeding the five thousand. It also includes the breaking of bread and the drinking of the cup of wine, the cup of suffering, as the participants remember the angel of death passing over the homes of the Israelites, (as they ate unleavened bread and the lambs, whose blood had been smeared on the doorposts of their homes), before they were set free to leave for the Promised Land. They ate unleavened bread and the flesh of the lambs whose blood was smeared on the doorposts.

John explains that as they shared the Passover feast, Jesus washed the disciples feet and then taught them, (John 13-17). He does not say anything about the actual meal. The other gospels, however, describe how during supper, Jesus took the bread and the wine and related them to the sacrifice of his body and the shedding of his blood, forming the new covenant with us, (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20). He then told them to do this whenever they could in remembrance of him, which is what we do every time we share in the Sacrament, Holy Communion, Eucharist, (which means “give thanks”), Mass, Breaking of Bread or whatever we call this sacred meal. Paul shows the importance of the bread and wine for the disciples of Jesus as he sets out the Lord's Supper in his first letter to the Corinthians, in chapter 11, verses 23-26, in the earliest written account of the Lord's Supper.

We remember that this conversation, between Jesus and the Jews, comes after he gave thanks for the barley loaves and fish, and the feeding of the five thousand, and the discussion about the manna in the wilderness. Jesus is showing us that he is the true, genuine bread from heaven. When we eat the bread, and drink the wine, with faith, believing that Jesus is the Son of God, who gave his life for us on the cross and was raised from the dead, we have eternal life, (54) and live forever, (John 6:58). By eating the bread and drinking the wine, we show and know that we can trust Jesus with the whole of our life. We will abide in him and he in us, (John 6:56). This is freely offered to everyone who comes to Jesus and who believes in him.

At the Lent course on Wednesday evening, Bishop Andrew, said how much he longs to sing our hymns again. To that I would add the longing to share the Lord's Supper together. Lockdown has made me realise how much I had taken the Sacrament for granted and how much I miss sharing the bread and

the wine together. These are such ordinary things of life, but for us they are powerful symbols of Jesus' amazing love for us as we remember his time on earth. They have the power to open people's eyes to God's love, to bring assurance of forgiveness, healing, strength, peace and joy. John Wesley always saw Holy Communion as a means of grace and people are drawn to Jesus in the holding out of hands for bread and wine.

It never ceases to be a privilege to share the bread and wine at the Sacrament. It still moves me to see hands held out to receive the bread and wine. Hands which are young and soft; hands scarred and gnarled by hard work; hands grimy from working the earth; hands cracked and wriggled; hands of colour; hands of women and men, girls and boys, young and old, rich and poor, unlearned and learned, those known and strangers, joyful and sad, healthy and sick, living and dying; hands held out at the communion rail and over the blankets of hospital beds; and hands among hundreds and hands alone. They are all hands humbly held out to receive the bread in remembrance of the bread of life and the wine in remembrance of the true vine. We hold out our hands remembering the scars and love of Jesus. The eating and the drinking brings smiles and tears, healing and peace, forgiveness and release, and strength and hope for tomorrow.

After my experience of the press in Newton Abbot Magistrates' Court, and the complaints that followed, I was wary of what I said. After Jesus received complaints, he gave us the wonderful teaching on his being the bread of life and how he would give his life for us. His scars would become beautiful as we see how they bring us forgiveness, healing and eternal life. We remember them every time we share the Lord's Supper. We look forward to the day when we can meet again to share bread and wine. In the meantime, we know that Jesus feeds us and gives us what we need each day to follow him and carry on. We are worshipping and living in a different way in lockdown, but Jesus is giving us daily bread, quenching our thirst and with us in whatever life brings along. Amen.

**Hymn – Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words**

- **“An upper room did our Lord prepare” – StF 569**
- <https://youtu.be/KZ2iohk3CJw>

**Solo** - “We will meet” written by John Bell, sung by Alison Adam and accompanied by Ian McLarty of the Iona Community

<https://youtu.be/-y4DpYuncrg>

**Prayers of Intercession**

Using your own words pray for the needs of the world, your family and friends and yourself



**Hymn -** Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words  
“And can it be that I should gain” StF 345  
<https://youtu.be/sQeIGbKqiw8>

### The Blessing

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
And the love of God,  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
Be with us evermore. Amen.

### **An Irish Blessing - [https://youtu.be/2mWaoGn\\_jTY](https://youtu.be/2mWaoGn_jTY)**

May the road rise to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
The rains fall soft upon your fields.  
And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.