

8th August 2021



This short act of worship has been prepared for. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; for the Lord is a great God. (Ps 95, vv 2a,3a)

HYMN: StF 252 – [Jesus the Lord said](#): 'I am the bread'

Jesus, the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,
The Bread of Life for mankind am I.
The Bread of Life for mankind am I,
The Bread of Life for mankind am I'.
Jesus, the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,
The Bread of Life for mankind am I'.

Jesus the Lord said: I am the Door,
The Way and the Door for the poor am I.
The Way and the Door for the poor am I,
The Way and the Door for the poor am I'.
Jesus the Lord said: I am the Door,
The Way and the Door for the poor am I'.

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Light,
The one true Light of the world am I.
The one true Light of the world am I,
The one true Light of the world am I'.
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Light,

The one true Light of the world am I'.

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Shepherd,
The one Good Shepherd of the sheep am I.
The one Good Shepherd of the sheep am I,
The one Good Shepherd of the sheep am I'.
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Shepherd,
The one Good Shepherd of the sheep am I'.

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,
The Resurrection and the Life am I.
The Resurrection and the Life am I,
The Resurrection and the Life am I'.
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,
The Resurrection and the Life am I'.

Anonymous Urdu

Let us pray

Lord our God, eternal and wonderful, wholly to be trusted: you give life to all;
you help those who come to you and give hope to those who call on you.
Set our hearts and minds at peace, that we may bring our prayers to you with confidence and joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Blessed are you, Lord our God:
In your love you create all things out of nothing through your eternal word.
In your love you redeemed the world through our Lord Jesus Christ.
In your love you empower your people through the gift of the Holy Spirit.
We glorify and adore you. Amen.

**Holy God, we confess that we have rebelled against you and broken your law of love;
we have not loved our neighbours nor heard the cry of the needy.
Forgive us, we pray, and free us for joyful obedience; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

(Methodist Worship, Second Service (3A, 4A, 10A))

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Reading from [John 6: 35, 41-51](#)

John's account of Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper occupy five chapters (almost a quarter) of his gospel. Yet bizarrely, what they don't include are the words in all of the other three gospels which have been taken as the institution of Holy Communion.

What John does have is this chapter 6, through which we are led by the Lectionary on the 5 Sundays of August, and which centres around his claim in verse 35 to be the 'Bread of Life'. 'He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty'.

The context is very different (speaking to a crowd of Jews in the synagogue of Capernaum), but do these words in this chapter amount to the same thing as the ones that Matthew, Mark and Luke have Jesus say at the Last Supper? And how literally does he expect us to take them? After all, Roman Catholic doctrine asks its adherents to believe that, in the Mass, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus.

There are lots of examples where, in order to put something across, Jesus uses what is obviously metaphorical language. We recited some of them in the opening hymn: Jesus the Lord said 'I am the Bread/Vine/Way/Light/Life'. He also said he was the Good Shepherd, the Door of the Sheepfold, and lots of other things besides – things that he obviously doesn't expect us to take literally.

But that doesn't mean that there is any less reality in the point that he's making. Jesus calls his disciples the salt of the earth and (like himself) the light of the world. Why? Well, because Christians do (or at least should) add a particular flavour and a particular clarity to what goes on in society. And I'm sure that Romans and Methodists would at least agree on this, that at the Mass or whatever else we choose to call it, the essence of Jesus is there, even though all we can see on the table is the bread and wine.

And there's nothing particularly profound about that. After all, we assume, when we meet someone, that the reality of the spirit of that person is present, even though all we can see is his or her body.

It's not unheard of for a mother to say to her small daughter that she loves her so much she could eat her. That may be extravagant language, but it is the best way she can find to express what is a genuine truth. Even that small child understands that the mother isn't a cannibal; but even that small child understands also that there is truth in what the mother is trying to say.

When Jesus says (v 51) 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world' (and then, in vv 53-56, to which we shall come next week, extends the idea to drinking his blood), the Jews to whom Jesus is speaking are already very familiar with the idea of a sacrificial meal. They've been brought up on it, so to them this idea won't seem strange at all.

But Jesus brings two new ideas to the table: firstly, that it is God himself who is being sacrificed, and secondly that it is God's very life-blood and flesh that we are invited to consume. That was as shocking to them as it is to us – and I've no doubt that Jesus meant it to be.

Why? Well, I can only think that he thought it was the only way he could put over just how much God loves us, just how seriously he takes our sinfulness, and just how far his love is prepared to go in order to bridge the gap.

As for our response, what we can't do is to say: 'I'm sorry, but this idea that I should eat and drink the flesh and blood of God himself after he has been slaughtered for that very purpose – I can't accept it'. That's what Peter tried to do. When Jesus predicted his own death, Peter said 'No! – it mustn't be like that; I forbid it!' And what Jesus said in reply was: 'Get behind me, Satan – you think as men think, not as God thinks'.

We can't go back to the time before the event. The sacrifice has already taken place. God is love, and He, love itself, has already been offered, has already been sacrificed. All the more reason why we should want to take the God of Love (and the love of God) into our being. That's all there is left to do. William Barclay illustrates it like this:

'Think of it this way. Here in a bookcase is a book which a man has never read. It may be the glory and the wonder of the tragedies of Shakespeare; but so long as it remains unread upon his bookshelves it is external to him. One day he takes it down and reads it. He is thrilled and fascinated and moved. The story sticks to him; the great lines remain in his memory; now when he wants to, he can take that wonder out from inside himself and remember it and think about it and feed his mind and his heart upon it. Once the book was outside him. Now it is inside him and he can feed upon it. It is that way with any great experience in life. It remains external until we take it within ourselves.

It is so with Jesus. So long as he remains a figure in a book he is external to us; but when he enters into our hearts we can feed upon the life and the strength and the dynamic vitality that he gives to us. Jesus said that we must drink his blood. He is saying: "You must stop thinking of me as a subject for theological debate; you must take me into you, and you must come into me; and then you will have real life." That is what Jesus meant when he spoke about us abiding in him and himself abiding in us'.

HYMN: StF 597 – [O Thou who this mysterious bread didst in Emmaus break](#)

O thou who this mysterious bread
didst Emmaus break,
return, herewith our souls to feed,
and to thy followers speak.

Unseal the volume of thy grace,
apply the gospel word,
open our eyes to see thy face,
our hearts to know the Lord.

till thou the veil remove;
talk with us, and our hearts shall burn
with flames of fervent love.

Enkindle now heavenly zeal,
and make thy mercy known,
and give our pardoned souls to feel
that God and love are one

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Of thee communing still, we mourn

PRAYERS of INTERCESSION

Lord God, we give you thanks for the way in which, through the sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, you provide for our spiritual wellbeing, just as through the gifts of food and drink, you provide for our physical health. And even as we give you thanks for meeting our daily needs, so we thank you too for the picturesque language that is sometimes the most effective way of communicating your eternal truths.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for Christians throughout the world, especially for those in places where there is civil strife of repression, or where they can meet only in secret, even to celebrate in the Holy Communion the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for all those Ministers and their families who will be moving this week, or about now, into a new part of the country or a new appointment; especially for Janet, Imran and Ray as they take up their new roles; for Marian Olsen and Nick Cutts as they arrive to minister amongst us; and for congregations as, from next month, they and their Ministers get to know one another.

We pray too for young people who are awaiting the grades awarded on their year's work; especially those who, in the light of those grades, have decisions to take about their future.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for those who are not well, and those who care for them; for all people who have any kind of anxiety or trouble, and for those who offer support.

We pray for our families and friends, and for ourselves, asking the blessing of your Holy Spirit on each and every home.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

We ask your comfort for those recently bereaved or experiencing the anniversary of a bereavement, and we give you thanks for the lives of all those who have gone before, trusting in the Jesus Christ who gave his body and blood for our sakes, and in whose name all our prayers are asked. Amen.

HYMN StF 587 – [I am the Bread of Life](#)

May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in all goodness so that we may do his will; and may he make of us what he would have us be through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever! Amen. (*Hebrews 13 vv 20-21*).