

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 23rd March 2025
The Third Sunday in Lent
The Rev'd Dr Lance Stone

Call to Worship

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

Psalm 63: 5-8

Opening Prayer

Holy and gracious God,
creator of the world and giver of life
we praise and bless your holy name.
You are the God who made us,
you are the God who freed your people
from slavery in Egypt,
the God who fed them in the wilderness.
And you are the God who has come among us
in Jesus Christ, the bread of life, who feeds our very souls.
You nourish us with your word,
and you quench our thirst with the your Spirit.

Confession and Pardon

O God we come to you, spiritually hungry.
We confess that we turn from you,
seeking fulfilment elsewhere,
spending our money for that which is not bread,
and labouring for that which does not satisfy.
We pray together for your grace and your pardon.
Forgive in us what has gone wrong,
Repair in us what is wasted,

Reveal in us what is good.
And nourish us with better food
than we could ever purchase:
your Word, your love,
your daily bread for life's journey
in the company of Jesus Christ our Lord.
In his name and in his words we pray together, saying... **Amen.**

All Age Activity

Today in the service we are going to be thinking about food, so ask the congregation some questions – e.g.:

- It's your birthday and you are going out for a meal. What kind of restaurant (Chinese? Indian? Italian? French....?)
- What would be your favourite dish (main course? Desert?) and what would you drink with your meal?
- Anyone in the congregation a vegetarian? Or a vegan? Or a pescatarian (no meat, but eats fish).
- How much, per head, would you be prepared to pay for a meal out? Anyone know the most expensive restaurant in the world? It's likely to be one called Sublimotion on the island of Ibiza, where you are likely to pay £2000 per head. But you get more than just a meal there – it's a total 'immersive experience' where you will be given virtual reality goggles to take you into a virtual world (Google it).

Question: food appears often in the Bible: can people think of any references... (e.g.: forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, manna in the wilderness, Elijah and the widow, John the Baptist's locusts and wild honey, Jesus' meals with sinners, the feeding of the 5000, the Last supper, Peter and the Roman centurion... etc etc)?
So this morning we are going to read two passages that relate to food...

Prayer for Illumination

Living God,
Open our ears and our hearts to your Word,
that it may become flesh in our lives,
and to the glory of your holy name. Amen,

Reading

Isaiah 55:1-9 | 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Sermon Notes

Theme: You are what you eat.

Sermon structure:

a) *Intro*

The setting of the season of Lent, when we commemorate Jesus' fasting in the wilderness, makes it appropriate that our two readings refer to eating and drinking. Opportunity for us to think about food, our diet, what we eat, and what it says about us.

b) *Exegesis*

Isaiah 55 is spoken to exiles living in Babylon who are faced with the choice of being Jewish or Babylonian, of retaining or forfeiting their identity as God's people. So the image of the 'rich food' is an image of salvation, of choosing life with God over against Babylon. Salvation is often pictured this way in the Bible: Jesus portrayed the Kingdom of God as a wedding feast and spoke of bread and wine as his body broken and his blood shed for our salvation. So Isaiah is picturing the choice facing the exiles, between Babylon and Jerusalem, as a kind of 'beggars banquet' which is free and nourishing, and junk-food that cannot satisfy but leaves us hungry and craving more.

The end of the chapter pictures the Jews leaving Babylon and exile and returning home to Jerusalem (Isaiah 55:12f). But the question is, do they want to leave? Are they at home in Babylon? Have they become Babylonian? Maybe the first generation of exiles would have pined for Jerusalem but maybe later generations were at home in Babylon and ready to compromise their Jewishness. Isaiah's message is 'don't sell out!'

We have an example of a Jewish exile who did not sell out. He flourished in Babylon, rising to a high position in the king's court. But he refused to compromise his identity and his God. And how did he demonstrate his loyalty? – through food: his refusal to eat the diet of the king's table but only to eat vegetables and drink water. Commitment to God is expressed in diet.

Similar issues in the reading from 1 Corinthians 10. The church in Corinth, called to stand out in the decadent culture of Corinth, was reverting to old ways and habits. And Paul is challenging them to retain their distinctive identity. Like Isaiah he uses the image of food to demonstrate the choice between Corinth and Jesus: he reminds them of how God provided for the people of Israel in the wilderness, giving them manna and water from the rock and yet they were tempted by the lure of Egypt – to return to captivity. The Corinthians are in danger of doing the same thing. And the issues come to head – where else? – around food. Paul finds that at the Lord's table old distinctions and pecking orders are re-emerging as

the rich are feasting while the poor are going hungry. Once again, food symbolises and expresses what is involved in salvation.

c) Weaving the threads

Food reveals to us deep truths about who we are and how we live. So it is vital to think about our eating habits. eg:

- families often do not eat together but eat in front of TVs or computer screens often in different places and at different times. (Eg of a Cambridge College which had to tell students to stop coming and going during College dinners – obviously not used to beginning and ending meals together). Reveals the breakdown in community and our addiction to screens.
- The way that plastic is used in the selling of food. Impossible to resist plastic packaging in supermarkets, despite catastrophic effect of plastic on the environment, especially marine life.
- The meat industry: appalling treatment of animals, effect of methane gas on global warming, cutting down of rainforest to grow soya to feed cattle to make burgers, effect of lowering resistance to antibiotics.
- The levels of waste, food thrown away in a world where many struggle to feed themselves.

How appropriate that the great symbol of globalisation and capitalism is the McDonalds sign, the angel's wings, that span the globe. The world unites around fast-food burgers; the spread of capitalism is measured by the spread of McDonalds. Why do we collude with it? The food industry functions as a Babylon that holds us in captivity?.

d) Conclusion

As with the exiles in Isaiah's day and the Church in Corinth in Paul's day salvation is pictured in dietary terms. Our commitment to Christ finds expression in the food we eat. Whether or not we fast in the season of Lent it can be a time to consider how we eat and what we eat – the choices we make and what they disclose.

Prayers of Intercession

O God, you tell us that we do not live by bread alone, for our souls need satisfying as well as our bodies. Yet we need to eat, and food can be one of the great joys of life.

And so today we pray firstly for those who go hungry today, those who are threatened with food shortages and famine – in places like Gaza and Sudan, where food is in short supply because of conflict, or greed, or incompetence.

O God we pray for fair and wise distribution of the world's resources. And we pray for charities and NGOs that work to bring relief to places where food is short: for the World Food Programme, for Christian Aid, TEAR Fund and Oxfam and others.

O God bless their work and bring food to those threatened with starvation.

And God, we pray to day for the food industry, for those whose business is to provide our needs. May they act in ways that are responsible, ways that are just, ways that are conducive to the wellbeing of the environment, ways that do not wreak undue pain and suffering on our fellow creatures. Guide the meat industry, we pray, and our participation in it, in ways that are humane and sustainable.

And God we pray once again for peace in our world - and especially in Gaza, and the middle east. And we pray for displaced people, for people who have lost loved ones, who have lost their homes and possessions.

And God we pray again for your church in the midst of a suffering world – that it might be a light, a place of hope and of humanity. Help us to offer to the world the true living bread, the rich food of the Gospel. And show us we pray, especially in this season of Lent, what it means to live out the feast of the Kingdom.

We ask you now to hear these prayers, for we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

For all that blesses and enriches our lives,
not least the food that we enjoy and that gives us strength,
we give you thanks and praise.

**Take us and all that you have given us
and use us in the service of your Kingdom. Amen**

Blessing

May God be above you,
and God beside you,
and heaven all around you
as you journey on;
and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy spirit,
be with you all, today and always. Amen

Suggested Hymns

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Break thou the bread of life	314		153	64
Lord Thy Word Abideth	317			446
How Deep the Father's Love For Us		549		988
When I Receive the Peace of Christ		566		
As the deer pants for the water		550	544	37
Jesus thou joy of loving hearts	389	662		
Now My Tongue the Mystery Singing	457	667		
Seek ye first the kingdom of God	512	641	254	590
Lord We Have Come At Your Own Invitation		637	595	
For the fruits of all creation	42	231	124	153
God Is Working His Purpose Out	573	235		189
Guide me O thou great Jehovah	345	167	465	201
The God of Abraham Praise	121	162	91	645

RS – Rejoice & Sing | CH4 – Church Hymnary 4 | StF – Singing the Faith | MP – Mission Praise