**Service of Worship – Sunday 8th August 2021**

Hello - my name is Andy Platt from Bamford Chapel and Norden URC. Today’s service is focussed on two words - hunger and bread. Not in the normal idea of physical hunger, but in terms of spiritual hunger. Our souls are hungry for spiritual fulfilment and this is fulfilled through Jesus. He is our living bread and it is only through him that we are spiritually nourished.

**Let us pray**

Lord God, you have the bread of life for the hungry

and living water for the thirsty.

We come hungry and thirsty for your word,

with a desire to know your will

and to love with your unconditional love.

Help us to be fed and to learn from you.

Amen.

**Our first hymn is – As the dear pants for the water – MP37**

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| 1.. As the deer pants for the water  so my soul longs after You.  You alone are my heart's desire  and I long to worship You | 2.. I want You more than gold or silver,  only You can satisfy.  You alone are the real joy-giver  and the apple of my eye |
| 3.. You're my friend and You are my brother,  even though You are king  I love You more than any other  So much more than anything. | Chorus: *You alone are my strength, my shield,*  *to You alone may my spirit yield.*  *You alone are my heart's desire*  *and I long to worship you.* |
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**Family time**

What invention by John Montagu was a good thing for picnics?

What does the word Bethlehem mean in Hebrew?

According to an old wives tale – how do you make your hair curly?

Which advert was filmed on Gold Hill, Shaftesbury, Dorset?

Damper is what in Australia?

What are sometimes known as grissini or grissino?

Who describes himself as “the bread of life”?

Bread is everywhere around us - bread rolls, sliced, white, full grain , unleavened, baguettes, brioche and so on. Bread is fundamental to life. Jesus is the bread of life and is fundamental to everlasting life.

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

We thank and praise you, Lord God,

that despite our assumptions and judgements

and the way we sometimes treat others,

you never stop loving us.

Bread of life, you are always with us.

We praise you that as we draw near to you,

you quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger,

so that we never need hunger or thirst again.

Thank you that you equip us and resource us

with everything we need for this journey of life.

We thank and praise you, Lord God.

Amen

**Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

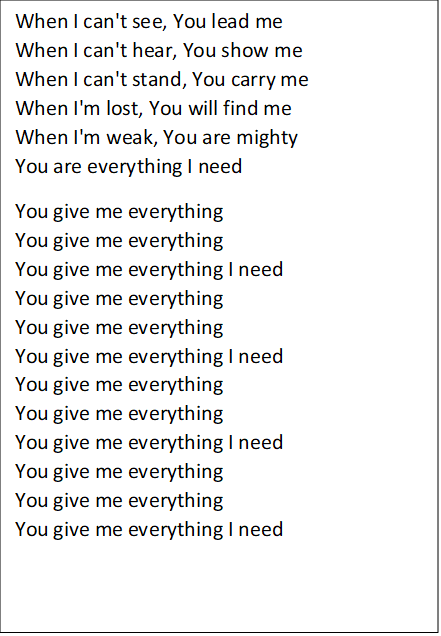
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. AMEN.

**Hymn – Everything (Lauren Daigle)**

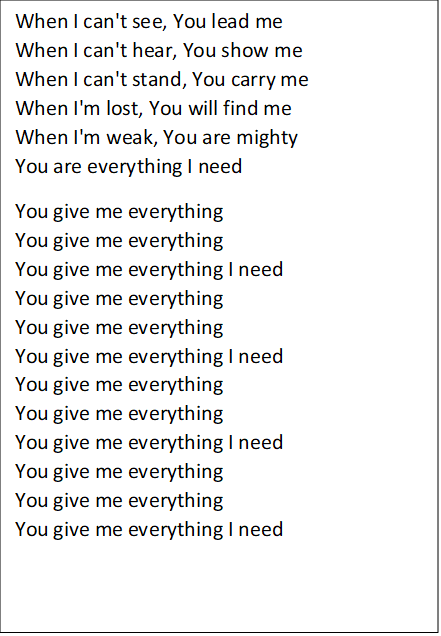


Even the sparrow has a place to lay its head  
So why would I let worries steal my breath?  
Even the roses, You have glowed them brilliant red  
Still I'm the one You love more than this

You give me everything  
You give me everything  
You give me everything I need

Even the oceans push and pull at Your command  
So You can still my heart with Your hand  
You tell the seasons when it's time for them to turn  
So I will trust You even when it hurts

You give me everything  
You give me everything  
You give me everything I need  
You give me everything  
You give me everything  
You give me everything I need



**Bible Reading - 1 Kings 19.4-8 (NIVUK)**

4while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” 5Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 6He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

7The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” 8So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

**Talk 1 – Spiritual Hunger**

Elijah is fresh from his triumph over the priests of Baal and their champions, Ahaz and Jezebel.

But rather than being full of the energy of triumph, he is fit to die and would gladly expire under the broom tree. But God has other ideas. So, here we have another desert feeding. And the purpose of this one is that the prophet will have the energy for a 40-day journey, at the end of which he will meet God at Horeb. He is being nourished physically.

There are two views of human life – the first is that we are just very clever animals – flesh and blood. We live, we breathe, we process food and drink, we reproduce and we die. The universe and all life within it is just a great big cosmic accident, caused by physics and chemistry. The second view is that there is another part of life – a spiritual side, another dimension to life. Yes, we are biological creatures dependant on the vagaries of physics and chemistry. However we don’t believe the universe and life is just an accident – we believe there is a purpose and an intent behind it, driven by a creator. Our physical side needs food and drink. We hunger, we get tired, we feel pain. And like our physical nature, our spiritual side can suffer. Our spiritual side can feel pain, it can need nourishment. Do you have those times in your life when you feel down, spiritually low, unable to cope with what is happening around you? Do you sometimes wonder why things aren’t going right, why life isn’t good? Spiritual hunger can be caused by physical needs. It is no good telling someone they are spiritually blessed, when they are physically hungry or thirsty. But likewise, you can be physically well fed but still not feel spiritually fulfilled, still not feel spiritually blessed.

I did a bit of research across a number of organisations including a very interesting site called Pewresearch. Apart from the USA, the richest countries in the world are those that are spiritually weakest – having the lowest percentages of people attending church or identifying as a practicing Christian. In the rich western countries we often complain about how the Christian Church is declining and reducing in numbers, but worldwide the Christian Church is growing, particularly in those countries which are poorer and even in those countries where Christians are persecuted. Highest attendances are in Africa and Central America. I mentioned the USA which is interesting as it does have a high number of practicing Christians, but the numbers are declining.

In the rich west, particularly Western Europe, we have populations who are physically well provided for, have good social services, who have more than enough to eat and drink and who are comparatively wealthy. BUT their spiritual health is poor and declining. We hear stories about the new plagues of depression and mental health. And these are very real illnesses. Spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing are all inter-related. Physical illness can cause depression, chemical imbalances in the brain can cause mood swings. The medical professions are experts at understanding the causes and potential cures for physical and mental issues.

But how does spiritual health come into this. Is it just a coincidence that countries that have lower church attendance also seem to have higher rates of depression. What is the cure for spiritual needs?

**Let us pray**

When we are feeling low, help us to find you

When the world around us appears confusing and scary, help us to look for you

When we can’t cope, help us to lean on you

Help us to recognise the need to balance physical, mental and spiritual well being

Looking after ourselves, valuing the work of the medical professions and trusting in you

Amen

**Hymn - Longing For Light**

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| --- | --- |
| 1.. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.  Longing for truth, we turn to you.  Make us your own, your holy people,  light for the world to see. | 2.. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  Longing for hope, many despair.  Your word alone has power to save us.  Make us your living voice. |
| 3.. Longing for food, many are hungry.  Longing for water, many still thirst.  Make us your bread, broken for others,  shared until all are fed. | 4.. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  Longing for warmth, many are cold.  Make us your building, sheltering others,  walls made of living stone. |
| 5.. Many the gifts, many the people,  many the hearts that yearn to belong.  Let us be servants to one another,  making your kingdom come. | Chorus: Christ, be our light!  Shine in our hearts.  Shine through the darkness.  Christ, be our light!  Shine in your church gathered today. |
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**Bible Reading - John 6.35,45-51 (NIVUK)**

**35**Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

**45**It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+6%3A35%2C+45-51&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26303a)] Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. **46**No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. **47**Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. **48**I am the bread of life. **49**Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. **50**But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. **51**I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

**Talk 2 – Bread of Heaven**

So what is that feeds our spiritual hunger? Jesus comes out and says some very controversial statements. He says: he is the bread of life and coming to him will ensure that no one hungers or thirsts on the journey. This statement gets a very angry response. They know Jesus – the son of the carpenter. He is Joseph’s son, a boy whose mum and dad they know –he can’t be anyone special.

But, if the crowd really knew their history, they would know that it was full of people dragged from ordinary lives, and given hugely important and life-changing roles by God (e.g. Moses, Elijah, David, Ruth – and a whole host of other Old Testament people).

Now Jesus becomes mystical and starts referring to the end days. He says people can only come to him if God draws them to him. He says that he, Jesus not God - will raise those who have come to him as a result of the Father’s grace (v.44). The Jewish people had come to believe that they would enjoy resurrection at the end of history and Jesus says that he is the key to that.

Then he says that if they knew their history, the history they keep telling him about, they would know that the prophets had predicted all this, that God spoke to his people, and led them to himself (the quotation of Isaiah 54.13 in v.45). And Jesus is claiming that he is the fulfilment of all this, that those who believe in him enjoy the resurrection he bestows on those drawn to him by his Father. He is the source of the life so many are searching for. The people need to change their assumptions about God and about him.

Again he says, ‘I am the bread of life.’ Those who come to Jesus will never die. He has to say this twice, because what he is suggesting is so difficult for them to get their heads round.

How will this happen? They will be sustained for the journey by the bread that he gives, namely his flesh. Well, that’s going to get a reaction, isn’t it?

Do you feel the need for sustenance on your journey? Are you hungry? When life seems too much, when the problems of the world are too much for you, when you can’t see the point of it all – do you turn to Jesus? Do you place everything before him and trust him to sustain you through your journey? We are all hungry, we are all in need of spiritual sustenance. Without it we cannot expect to successfully win the prize, to complete the journey. It is only through Jesus Christ, the lowly son of the carpenter, that we will have the strength to live our lives as he expects. And it is a gift given freely to all who ask for it – to all those who are called to him.

Amen

**Hymn – Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah – MP201**

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| --- | --- |
| 1.. Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  pilgrim through this barren land;  I am weak but Thou art mighty;  hold me with Thy powerful hand:  Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,  feed me now and evermore,  feed me now and evermore. | 2.. Open now the crystal fountain,  whence the healing stream doth flow;  let the fiery, cloudy pillar  lead me all my journey through:  strong deliverer, strong deliverer,  be Thou still my strength and shield;  be Thou still my strength and shield. |
| 3.. When I tread the verge of Jordan,  bid my anxious fears subside;  death of death, and hell's destruction,  land me safe on Canaan's side.  songs of praises, songs of praises,  I will ever give to Thee;  I will ever give to Thee. | Harry E. Fosdick John Hughes Peter William William ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |

**A prayer of confession**

When we focus on physical well being and ignore our spiritual health

forgive us, Lord.

When we see our wealth and decide it is enough to make us happy:

forgive us, Lord.

When we consider others poor who may be spiritually stronger than us

forgive us, Lord.

Let us journey together towards wholeness and health, knowing that only God can truly sustain us and set us free from our needs.

Amen.

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Giver and sustainer of life,

through the power of the cross

we are a forgiven people,

a royal priesthood, a holy nation,

chosen by you

who has called us out of darkness into your marvellous light.

Amen.

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord God, there are so many people who need the difference in their lives that only you can bring. They need the bread of life.

Lord, sometimes we feel so useless when faced with all the needs of our world.

We forget the important part we play just by opening our lives to you, praying to you, and being your hands and feet, when we are fed and guided by you.

We pray today for our families, our friends, our peers and all those we meet..

Help us to nourish them with your word.

We pray for everyone who has helped us grow closer to you, for our church family, and our ministers.

We pray for those who do not have physical bread, who are so focussed on surviving day to day that they cannot see you as the bread of life.

We pray for our community and the world in which we live and work. We spend a few seconds thinking of those known personally to us, who need the spiritual nourishment you provide.

We pray for people who feel they have nothing to share, nothing even to live for; the homeless, prisoners, people at the end of relationships, the sick and those who mourn.

Help us to share the message of hope you bring.

Amen.

**Our next hymn is - Lord for the years MP428**

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| 1.. Lord, for the years, Your love has kept and guided,  urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,  sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:  Lord for the years, we bring our thanks today. | 2.. Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,  speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,  teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:  Lord of the word, receive Your people's praise. |
| 3.. Lord, for our land in this our generation,  spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care:  for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,  Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer. | 4.. Lord, for our world where men disown and doubt You,  loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,  hungry and helpless, lost indeed without You:  Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign. |
| 5.. Lord for ourselves; in living power remake us-  self on the cross, and Christ upon the throne,  past put behind us, for the future take us:  Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone. | Timothy Dudley-Smith © 1969 by Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL 60188.  ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 |

**A sending out prayer**

Thank you, Lord, for believing in us,

for seeing beyond our outside, our flesh and blood,

for knowing who we really are inside.

Thank you for giving us all we need to do your will

Even though we may feel physically inadequate.

Thank you, Lord, for feeding us – for providing the bread of heaven,

Amen.

**Finally a hymn to listen to as we finish our service - Open Our Eyes**

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| --- | --- |
| 1.. Open our eyes, O Lord, we pray,  enlighten heart and mind;  that as we read your word today  we may its treasures find. | 2.. Open our ears that, small and still,  your voice be clearly heard,  to guide our steps and cleanse our will  according to your word. |
| 3.. Open our lives to love's embrace,  our dear redeeming Lord:  your word of life and truth and grace  within our souls be stored. | 4.. Open our lips, O Lord, in praise  to tell what love imparts:  the work of grace about our ways,  your word within our hearts. |
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