

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches**  
**Team Ministry worship for individuals or a family**  
**Sunday 15th August 2021 at 10:30 am.**

**Call to worship**

From God came the sustenance for people who wandered in wilderness places.  
That was the bread from heaven!  
From God comes Jesus Christ, the eternal bread that sustains our lives.  
Christ is the Bread of Life!  
Let us praise God for such wondrous gifts of life.  
Let us sing and raise our voices in gratitude for all that God does for us - AMEN.

**Hymn**

For everyone born, a place at the table, for everyone born, clean water and bread,  
A shelter, a space, a safe place for growing, for everyone born, a star overhead,

*And God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace:  
Yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!*

For woman and man, a place at the table, revising the roles, deciding the share,  
With wisdom and grace, dividing the power, for woman and man, a system that's fair,

*And God will delight...*

For young and for old, a place at the table, a voice to be heard, a part in the song,  
the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled, for young and for old, the right to belong,

*And God will delight...*

For just and unjust, a place at the table, abuser, abused, with need to forgive,  
in anger, in hurt, a mind-set of mercy, for just and unjust, a new way to live,

*And God will delight...*

For everyone born, a place at the table, to live without fear, and simply to be,  
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship, for everyone born, the right to be free,

*And God will delight...*

**Opening Prayer**

Praise be to God our Creator, who gives, generously, all that we need for abundant life

Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ, who gives, lovingly, His own body, our living Bread,  
so that we may enjoy eternal life

Praise to the Holy Spirit, God's gift to His people, bringing life from the Creator and the  
Risen Lord to both His Church and all creation.

Forgive us that we take more than we need from the Earth without re-sowing  
Forgive us that we hold back our own service and gifts and so impoverish your kingdom  
Forgive us that we turn deaf ears to the leading of that same Holy Spirit

Take, again and afresh, all that we offer and give, for the sake of Your Kingdom

Hear our prayer for daily bread as we say the prayer that Jesus taught us...

**The Lord's Prayer**

## Readings:



**1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14** - Solomon asks for wisdom

**Psalms 111** - Praise for God's Wonderful Works

**Ephesians 5:15-20** - wise living

**John 6:51-58** - The Bread from Heaven

## Reflection

Sweet potato pie, corn bread, fried okra, candied yams, buttery biscuits, fried chicken, fried ice cream, peach cobbler. No, I'm not talking about my lunch. All these mouth-watering images are what are known as soul food. A food which provides both physical and spiritual nourishment. Soul food emerged in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama; a collection of states commonly referred to as the Deep South. Soul food came about during slavery, when Black slaves were forced to create their own meals using only the leftovers, the scraps that their owners did not eat. With these leftovers, these scraps of food, slaves were able to create and cook hearty meals that they could enjoy after a long day of exhausting labour under brutal conditions. The majority of the recipes prepared by slaves were not taught to them; rather, they fashioned these new and modified dishes from scratch. Due to the lack of resources, many of the dishes were created using the most ordinary ingredients. Yet this new type of food, provided physical as well as spiritual nourishment. It symbolised freedom, comfort and community, hence the reason slaves originally referred to soul food as "comfort food" or "food for the soul."

Soul food emerges in times of great social division. Soul food symbolises freedom. Soul food sustains a sense of community and belonging. Soul food provides both physical and spiritual nourishment.

In Jesus' culture, bread was vital, a staple food, as it still is now in many places. Bread is still called the "staff of life" because it contains almost all the nutrition needed for the human body. It is a very basic food that supports life. The world of bread is vast and varied: some form of bread is found in virtually every society and culture. Bread contains almost all the nutrition needed for the human body to physically function.

However, we are not just physical beings, we are spiritual beings, mental and emotional beings. Beings with thoughts, with emotions with questions. Questions about life, the universe and everything. Who am I? What is the meaning of life? Where do I belong? In other words, we are beings who are full of questions about spirituality. And, so we long for, we hunger for soul food which provides both physical and spiritual nourishment.

Over the last few weeks, in our Gospel readings from John: a large crowd has been following Jesus and His disciples. And in this crowd, both physical and spiritual hunger are expressed. Previously, we have heard how Jesus fed a huge crowd of people – more than five thousand, in fact – with just five barley loaves and two fish. He responded to the crowd's physical hunger by providing physical nourishment. And in our reading from John this morning, Jesus responds to the crowd's spiritual hunger. Jesus tells the crowd, "I am the bread of life." In other words, His life, His story, His Way offers both physical and spiritual nourishment.

John's Gospel is written in the second century. He is writing to a specific community of people. A community of Jewish-Christians that have been ostracised for their belief in Jesus. Or

more specifically, they have been thrown out of their synagogue. Which is to say they have been separated from their entire social, religious, and communal life. They have become outsiders. The excluded. The marginalised.

Have you ever been excluded from something? Or abandoned? Or left behind? Or marginalised? Or do you know communities who have experienced this? Then you know what John's readership feels like.

In this context, listen once again to those words Jesus speaks to the crowd. Listen again to Jesus' words recognising that they were written for a community that has been kicked out, excluded marginalised. Jesus says: 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

Jesus does not say: ONLY whoever comes to the synagogue, ONLY whoever goes to church enough, ONLY certain people with specific beliefs. Jesus creates a sense of radical inclusion, a sense of belonging a sense of community where all are welcome.

Can you imagine how earth-shattering, how life-changing these words, this message are for this community of Jewish-Christians that has been excluded? Can you imagine how earth-shattering, how life-changing these words this message continues to be for communities, for individuals who are excluded today?

Going back to "soul food." After the end of slavery, soul food continued to be an integral part of African-American culture. Throughout the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 60s, soul food restaurants served as shelters for leaders and protesters. Buttermilk biscuits had long been a soul food favourite for feeding the hungry because they are hearty, inexpensive, and easy to make.

Georgia Gilmore, a previous cafeteria cook from Montgomery, Alabama, lost her job after protesting against segregation, against exclusion by supporting the bus boycott of 1955. Martin Luther King himself encouraged Georgia to open her own restaurant. So, she turned her home into what was basically an underground supper club. It was so popular that she often had lines out the door. Over the course of the Civil Rights Movement, she fed thousands of organisers right out of her own home kitchen.

Soul food is so much more than just a way to stay physically nourished. It also provides spiritual nourishment by creating a sense of radical inclusion, a sense of belonging, a sense of community.

As we go out this week, let us follow Jesus' Way in order to discover, embrace and work for radical inclusion, belonging and community in our church, our city and our world. And thereby make the Good News alive and real in our lives and world today and every day.

### **Music for reflection**

*Bread for the world, a world of hunger - Wine for all peoples, people who thirst  
May we who eat be bread for others - May we who drink pour out our love*

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the bread of life;  
Broken to reach and heal the wounds of human pain.  
Where we divide your people You are waiting there  
On bended knee, to wash our feet with endless care

*Bread for the world, a world of hunger...*

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the wine of peace,  
Poured into hearts once broken and where dryness sleeps  
Where we are tired and weary You are waiting there  
To be the way which beckons us beyond despair

*Bread for the world, a world of hunger...*

Lord Jesus Christ, You call us to your feast  
At which the rich and pow'rful have become the least  
Where we survive on others in our human greed  
You walk among us begging for your ev'ry need

*Bread for the world, a world of hunger...*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Jesus Christ, Living Bread of Heaven  
Hear our prayers for this world

May all have a place of peace to eat - in places of war, like Afghanistan and Yemen  
May all have a safe place to build community where environmental disaster threatens, like Greece and California  
May all have enough land on which to grow food and gather water, in Ethiopia, East Africa and Northern Nigeria  
May all have enough to eat, where there is harvesting but also hunger, as in the Sahel region of Africa, in the steppes of Russia, the river valleys of China and in our own land

Jesus Christ, Living Head of your people  
Hear our prayers for your Church

May we be a people who share our daily bread, in foodbanks, in our generous invitation to gatherings, in our hospitality to one another and to strangers  
May we be a people who share our gifts generously, in our daily service, and in our giving to those in need and to charity  
May we be a people who share the daily bread of your eternal word, in our witnessing to and sharing our understanding of your grace  
May we be a people who share your love freely with all, regardless of race and gender, ability and position, as we imitate you in kindness, and as we express our praise in action  
May we be a people who empower others as we encourage each other and as we pray for those in need (*Share the needs of people on your heart and mind, here...*)

### **Hymn R&S 345**

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.

Open now the crystal fountain, whence the healing stream doth flow;  
Let the fire and 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.

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.

### **Blessing**

May we know the God who offers us nourishment;  
May we share in the food that brings us life;  
May we know the welcome of the table of God;  
And may we know the blessing of God, The Creator, the Son & the Holy Spirit,  
Be with us, those we love, and those we ought to love. This day and always. Amen.