**The Most Revd Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York, reflects on John 6:35, 41-51 for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, 11th August 2024.**

Still hung up with signs and wonders, just before our gospel reading's opening statement from Jesus that he's the bread of life, the people question him.

Their ancestors have been given manna in the desert; what sign will Jesus give?

Well, first of all, they seem to have forgotten about yesterday's free lunch because these are the same people whom Jesus had fed with bread and fish - so much bread and fish that there were baskets of leftovers - but Jesus patiently persists.

"It wasn't Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my father, who gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

They reply, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Then there is this astonishing announcement that is not just the heart of this chapter; you could say the heart of the gospel itself - the revelation that God makes to us in Jesus Christ. Everything else that Jesus says and does flows from it and to it.

"I am the bread of life," says Jesus.

These words, "I am..." which Jesus uses throughout John's gospel are themselves an indication of Jesus taking to himself the mysterious sacred name revealed to Moses. But now he says, "I am the bread that the father gives.

"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.

"Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

It's not yesterday's loaves, however miraculously supplied, but Jesus himself, who is the bread the world needs - the bread that God is offering them. And it's impossible for us to read these amazing words today without of course, thinking of the Eucharist. In John's gospel, there is no account of the Last Supper. This is because of John's different chronology for the whole of the passion narrative. But in this chapter, John is consciously pointing us towards the central truths of the Christian faith that are indeed commemorated and renewed.

Whenever Holy Communion is celebrated and shared, people may complain that "This is only Joseph's son - why should we listen to him?"

But that is the whole point. God has come to us in the likeness of our own frail flesh. God has come down from heaven in order to raise us up. Jesus is the true bread, not bread like yesterday's bread, not bread like the manna eaten in the wilderness, but the bread that has come down from heaven in Jesus so that those who partake of him will live forever. And the broken bread and poured out wine of his body and blood is given for the life of the world.

If we eat this bread, which has the double meaning of 'If we believe in Jesus and make our home in him', and 'If we are faithful to break bread and share wine in remembrance of him', then we have a share in eternal life.

This is indeed the bread the world needs, the bread that unites us in Jesus to God, the bread that unites us to one another. And what we see in our world, however, is division. Horrible outbursts of intolerant racism and violence, the things we've all seen up and down the country this week and in our own diocese, in parts of Hull and Middlesbrough, hatred towards strangers.

And I've spoken to several clergy in the diocese and heard heartbreaking stories of, for instance, Asian Christians afraid to come out of the house and go to church; of people experiencing abuse and violence on their own streets - all fuelled by the loathing of those who've not yet received the bread of life, exacerbated by the inequalities and lack of opportunities by those in communities who get left behind, who have no bread to eat at all.

Jesus comes as food and drink; as life so that those who eat this bread will have life, his flesh given for the life of the world.

This bread is for everyone.