

(1 Kings 19:4-8; Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2; John 6:35, 41-51)

It is said that you can always predict the theme of a sermon if the preacher has been away. Well, I feel it right to warn you that my sermon today will be no different: it will be about my travels. And it will be short!

What I would like to mention is my recent trip, not to some far-flung location, but Kirby Hill, just up the road. I went there to admire the view over Holmedale: it's one of my favourite spots. Down below, I saw fields of golden grain, ripe for harvesting. Up above, in the field where I sat, and in many others all around, there was lush grass – mostly being grazed by contented-looking sheep. As I drank in this vista, the latter few verses of Psalm 65 sprang to mind:

‘You crown the year with your goodness,
and your paths overflow with plenty...
May the meadows be clothed with flocks of sheep
and the valleys stand so thick with corn
that they shall laugh and sing.’

Contrasting the golden grain and green grass, it occurred to me that whilst the grain was the raw material of bread for human beings to eat, so the *green* represented the ‘bread of life’ for sheep (and other ruminants, of course). Indeed, it would seem that sheep enjoy the experience of eating grass so much that they do little else!

Further afield, towards Middlesbrough, an array of wind turbines glinted in the evening sun. These modern windmills produce the power used presumably to mill grain, amongst other things. And there, below the horizon, I could make out the east-west route of the A66 from the constant flow of trucks, transporting cargos of every description to destinations unknown.

So from that peaceful spot I was in fact observing a hive of activity: from sheep ‘safely grazing’ to farmers literally making hay whilst the sun shone, to the perpetual motion of the infrastructure that supports the life of our nation.

And into my reverie came the theme of our readings today, and indeed of the last few weeks, ‘the bread of life’. Whilst we all strive to work our way through our to-do lists, to hit targets or to reach our destination Jesus, in saying ‘I am the bread of life’, is reminding us that there is more to life than relentless activity. Sheep may seem to live by grass alone, but Jesus poignantly points out that ‘man does not live by bread alone’.

Jesus invites into *fullness* of life, into peace of mind and joy of heart, into deep fulfilment in relationship with him. He promises this to us not in some unknown future but *now* – if we will only accept his invitation. And it is in Holy Communion with him that this relationship is renewed and refreshed, sustained and deepened. In Holy Communion it is our experience that ‘we live in him and he lives in us’.

Today, we hear Jesus say to us again, ‘Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty’. Indeed, later in this service, as we are invited to Communion, we will dwell on the magnitude of those words.

[Come to this table, not because you must
but because you may.

Come, not because you have all faith,
but because you have some faith and would like it to grow.

Come because you love the Lord a Little,
and would like to love him more.

Come because he loves you,
and wants to give you everything.

Come and be filled with the Living Bread.

Come in faith, and never thirst again.]

To underline the power of the call of Jesus to each of us to fulness of life, of the reality of his presence with us and within us, I will close with three short prayers. Like my brief sojourn in Kirby Hill, they take us out of that relentless cycle of life in which we are all caught, placing us once more in the peace of his life-giving embrace.

The first prayer is in fact a well-known sentence from St Augustine, but one which works well as a prayer, one which many of us will have used often over the years.

Let us pray.

‘[O Lord,] you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.’

‘Lord Jesus Christ, you are the way, the truth, and the life. Let us not stray from you who are the way, nor distrust your promises who are the truth, nor rest in anything but you who are the life, for beyond you there is nothing to be desired, neither in heaven nor in earth.’

‘Remember, Lord, what you have wrought in us, and not what we deserve, and as you have called us into [fulness of life] make us worthy of our calling.’

Thanks be to God. Amen.