



Church in a Bag



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WISH LIST

Sanity, beauty, kindness, care
All so simple if you dare
Sweet forgiveness, patience, peace,
Chickens, blackbirds, ducks and geese.
Trees and flowers, grass and seeds,
Hands and feet and coloured beads.
Cups of tea and distant bells
Clouds and mountains, cooking smells,
A garden path, a wooden chair,
Sanity, beauty, kindness, care.



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Sunday 1 August

Gathering

We praise you, O God, for the meaning that you give to our lives in and through Jesus.

From the Word, we know He is the sign of your deep and everlasting love for the world, and we rejoice in His promise to sustain us with His life.

Open our minds that we may perceive your kingdom. Lift up our eyes to where the cross of Christ stands for our healing.

Make us aware as His spirit moves among us to lead us in faith, so may we believe.

We praise you for filling our emptiness with His goodness.

For it is through Him, our Lord Jesus, whom You sent into the world that we know of Your love for us. We have arrived here hungry for more of that divine bread which feeds our soul.



With joyful hearts we now call out God's praise and with rejoicing we call upon Him. Here now with me is the God who created all things good, this is the God I now come to worship.

Praise be to God.

Reading

Ephesians 4:1-16

“There is one body
and one Spirit,
just as there is one hope
to which God has called you.”

Reflection

The Ephesians reading reflects on unity and purpose that can actually exist in today's complex and all too often perplexing social, political, economic and religious dividedness.

The need for diversity as the basis of unity in the body of Christ is well illustrated by a jigsaw puzzle. All the parts of the puzzle are of equal

importance to the completed puzzle, and obviously, without all the parts, the puzzle would be incomplete.

However, when building the puzzle, one looks first for the four corner pieces that are *foundational* to the completion of the rest of the puzzle.

So too are the four measures by which Paul of how he urges us to serve the Lord:

- ✓ **LIVE** a life that measures up to the standards God set when he called you.
- ✓ Be **HUMBLE** always, gentle and patient.
- ✓ **SHOW** your love by being tolerant of one another.
- ✓ **DO YOUR BEST** to preserve the unity the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together.

These are the corner pieces of Christian life and foundational to the mature body of Christ. So, when the unity of the puzzle is complete, the four corner pieces become of no more value than the combined purpose of being a Christian.

Adapted from Michael P. Green



Reading

John 6:24-35

‘I am the Bread of Life’

Reflection

There are several recounts throughout the Gospels demonstrating how some people just don’t get it and miss the point.

We recall Nicodemus as being too focused on being borne of woman. The rich man wondering how he missed being in heaven after ignoring the beggar at his gate. The traveller who could not give way to his earthly riches.

They and many others failed to hear the message of Jesus consistently and repeatedly stated in all of his preaching.

Perhaps this little story can illustrate our missing spiritual awareness. The story is told of a Queensland Aboriginal Binjara Elder visiting family in Brisbane and walking with a friend, a born Brisbane-ite, along the busy streets.

Suddenly, the Elder stopped and said, “I hear a cicada!”

“You’re crazy,” said his friend.

“No, I hear a cicada. I do! I’m sure of it.”

His friend, with head shaking, said, “It’s the noon hour. There are people bustling around here, there’s cars honking, tyres squealing, sirens in the distance...noises of all sorts from the city. I’m sure you can’t hear it.”

“I’m sure I do”, replied the elder. He listened attentively and then walked to the corner across the street and looked all around. Finally, on the corner he found a shrub in a large cement planter. He dug beneath the leaves and found a cicada.

His friend was astounded and stated, “Well, my hearing is good, but I can’t hear it”. The Elder said, “Well, my ears are no different than yours. It simply depends on what you are listening to. Here let me show you.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change - maybe five or six coins - and he dropped them on the concrete footpath. Every

head within a hundred feet turned.

“See what I mean?” he said, as he began picking up his coins. “It all depends on what you are listening for.”

Today’s reading from John reflects on this theme again, following the feeding of the 5000. All they could see was the miracle of the loaves and fishes and not the miracle before them in the presence of the Lord Jesus. They were looking right at the Bread of

Life, the miracle of God’s presence on earth. They missed it. They didn’t see it. They had not heard.

As Christians...we must have ears that listen, not just hear...and not just bread to feed the body, but Heavenly Bread that feeds us with His spirit and truth.



Closing Prayer

God, may we see in Your oneness our need for unity.

May we see in Your creativity our need for diversity.

May we see in You our need to love one another.

O Lord, grant us gratitude for what we have.

Prepare us for our daily bread the gift of life.

Unclutter our lives, Lord.
Give us space
and the simplicity of thankful hearts.

Forgive us
draw close to us.

Enable us to follow you
in worship and grateful service
each day of our lives.

Amen

With thanks to Dan Eaton for
preparing today's reflection



Pray ...

Sunday 8 August

Gathering

From Psalm 34

I will always praise the Lord.

With all my heart I will praise
the Lord.

Let all who are helpless listen
and be glad.

Honour the Lord with me!

Celebrate His great name.

I asked the Lord for help, and
He saved me from all my fears.

Preparation

Let us gather to hear the words
of Jesus: "I am the bread that
gives life! No one who comes
to me will ever be hungry. No
one who has faith in me will
ever be thirsty."

We have been nourished by the
giver of life, from a source that
will never run out, from a
source that can flow through us
to others.

Just as a whole loaf is separated
into parts and given to feed
many people, may we, all parts
of the body of Christ,
remember that we are sent out
to feed many. We are not
diminished by being scattered
into our community, for we still
contain the gifts and talents we
have been given. We still are
filled with the Spirit of God, and
we walk with the Giver of
Eternal Life.

As we have been fed and
nourished, may we feed and
nourish others.



Reading

John 6: 35, 41-51

Reflection

Which would you choose, given the option of a grub or a moth? Would it make any difference if I asked about a caterpillar or a butterfly? I would imagine most would choose the moth or the butterfly, especially if you are a gardener and do not want your precious plants eaten by a grub or a caterpillar. Yet the reality is that without the grub or caterpillar, there would be no moths or butterflies. Often, we want the end result without having to deal with the earlier part of the situation.

In today's John reading, all the people could see was the carpenter's son. They could not, or would not, see through to the promise he brought, despite the scriptures foretelling this; despite what they had been told; and despite his actions and what they were seeing when he was with people.

Jesus talked about Israel's ancestors and how, despite being fed on the manna from heaven, the people were

unchanged, and they still died. He has come to offer something so much better than manna: he brings himself, the co-creator, life giver and bringer of relationships both with and between people. He can change anyone who accepts him as He is; who sees past the human form to the spirit within; and who trusts His message with the simplicity of a child. He can offer never-ending relationship: He can offer eternal life.

And Jesus will offer this life. It will not be forced upon the unwilling. There will be no threats if one does not wish to accept. It will simply always be there, ready and waiting for anyone who turns and reaches out for it.

Once we accept the offer, we will be transformed, changed beyond all recognition, into a new being: one with the



attributes of Jesus: one who gives, who wants people to have a chance, who wants people to be the best they can be, and who does something about it as a response to the life-giving gift they have been given.

When we have been immersed in the love of God, we will be different. One of the quotes of Pope Francis is: *“You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That’s how prayer works”*. It is not enough to think about the starving people, action should bubble out of us because we cannot stop it.

Pope Francis has also been quoted as saying:

“Jesus teaches us another way: Go out. Go out and share your testimony, go out and interact with your brothers, go out and share, go out and ask. Become the Word in body as well as spirit”.

Amen to that.

A Song to sing

The Servant Song

Brother, sister, let me serve you
let me be as Christ to you
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey
and companions on the road
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ light for you
in the night-time of your fear
I will hold my hand out to you
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping
when you laugh I'll laugh with you
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey
through.

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you
let me be as Christ to you
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

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Closing Prayer

Life Giver
Co-creator
Spirit of life and love
be with us
as we go out into the week
changed and inspired
to be the prayers
that others see and experience.

Let us be confident
that the gift of eternal life
is ours, not only to have
but to share with others.

Let us be Christ to others.
Amen.

With thanks to Carolyn Sharp for
preparing today's reflection



Sunday 15 August

A Gathering

On the first day of the week
we come to worship our God
who comes to us
in Jesus of Nazareth.

To be reminded that
the essence of life
is to love one another
to focus on
the things that matter.

To be reminded that true life
is found and experienced
in living unselfishly
in thinking and caring
about others.

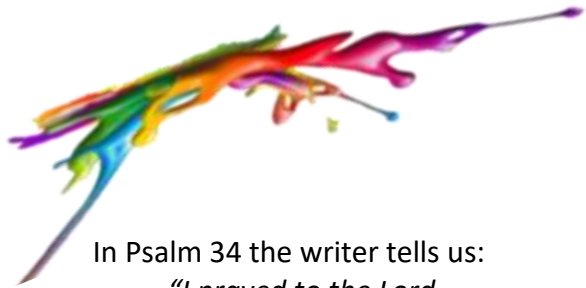
So we begin our time in
worship
seeking Your guidance
Your wisdom, Your presence.

That we may be lifted up
to love our God
and our neighbour
as ourselves.

Preparation

This time that we set aside to
worship and reflect on the
Gospel reading for the week is
so important. During the week
we can be caught up with so

many issues and incidents that
distract us, upset us, or cause
us distress and anxiety, that
there are times when we are
not at peace. We may be
worried. Jesus has made us an
offer too good to be refused:
*"Come unto me, all of you, who
are tired from carrying heavy
loads, and I will give you rest".*



In Psalm 34 the writer tells us:
*"I prayed to the Lord
and he answered me
he freed me from all my fears.
The oppressed look to him
and are glad;
The helpless call to him
and he answers
Find out for yourself
how good the Lord is."*

So let us relax, accept the offer
Jesus promises, and find
enrichment and joy and
meaning for our lives in this
time of worship and reflection.

Reading

John 6:51 to 58

Reflection

The Bread of Heaven – the Bread of Life

From the end of July and throughout August, the gospel readings have been from John's gospel chapter 6, which begins with the story of Jesus feeding five thousand. As you would have read in the previous Church in a Bag, this act had the effect of the people misrepresenting its message and believing that Jesus was *"the Prophet who was to come"*. So they wanted to seize him and make him king by force, because many people of Jesus' day expected the Messiah to be a warrior king like David and free them from Roman rule.

So John continues with Jesus having to tell the crowd that they had misunderstood his miracles. From here John's gospel seeks to reveal the purpose of Jesus' life and mission in saying, *"I am the bread of life"*, Jesus moves from the physical needs of food/bread to the spiritual needs.

These are the more important, more essential needs of one's inner self; the qualities that make us human, humane, unselfish, caring, willing to go the extra mile.

We can understand what Jesus is saying here. It's the same message implied when he said, *"Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where*

moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. For your heart will always be where your riches are."



Jesus is saying get your values right. Be more mindful of the treasures and qualities that are lasting, worthwhile; that contribute to a better community; the qualities that make us the kind of people we are meant to be.

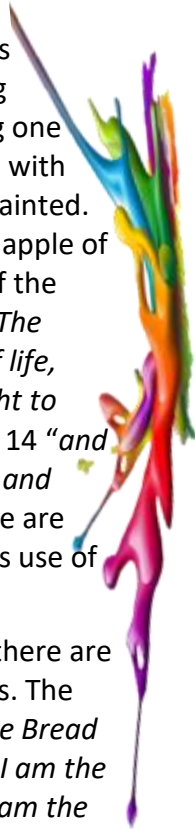
Much of John's gospel is metaphorical conveying messages by identifying one thing as something else with which we are well acquainted. For example: she is the apple of my eye. The opening of the gospel in verse 4 says *"The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind"*. And in verse 14 *"and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"*. These are clear examples of John's use of metaphors.

Through John's gospel there are seven 'I am' expressions. The first of these is *"I am the Bread of life"*. Then follows: *"I am the light of the world" ... "I am the door (gate) of the sheep" ... "I am the good shepherd" ... "I am the resurrection and the life" ... "I am the way, the truth and the life" ... and the last "I am the true vine"*.

Being aware of this metaphorical aspect, one must wonder whether this next section of John's chapter 6 is metaphorical, and not a verbatim quote of what Jesus actually said. As Marcus Borg, an American scholar of the gospels, wrote *"Jesus did not say of himself these I am statements, but rather, these statements reflect how John experienced Jesus. For John, Jesus was the bread, the light and so on"*.

That part of chapter 6 was easy to understand. From verse 51 the passage is difficult. The language is symbolical and not to be read literally. *"The bread that I will give him is my flesh" and "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in him."*

William Barclay, another well recognized Biblical scholar, wrote *"John is not giving, or trying to give, the actual words of Jesus. He has been thinking for 70 years of what Jesus said, and now, led by the Holy Spirit, he is giving the inner significance of the words."* John 6:56 – *"whoever eats ... and drinks ... lives in me, and I*





live in him” is the language of intimacy and shared life. I can only suggest one understanding of this: that Jesus is calling us to make a complete commitment to him; to his example and teachings; to who he is and to what we are called; to believe in him and in so doing, experience the presence of Jesus in our lives. He becomes part of us. That is what is meant by the expression to be transformed: to be born again and try to live as Jesus did. It is to strive to put others first; to care about others; to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Verse 54 says *“whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”*. The commentary in *With Love to the World* explains: *“Eternal life is not associated with an endless timer. Rather it points towards a life lived in the fulness of God’s love”*.

However, how is one then to understand the last sentence of verse 58, *“The one who eats this bread will live forever”*! I suggest the first part of verse 58 helps up to make sense of that last sentence: *“This then is*

the bread that came down from heaven. It is not like the bread that your ancestors ate, but later died.”

The manna the people ate in their journey from captivity in Egypt refers to the Law, to rules that one had to obey, rules that choked out compassion. The bread that Jesus offers is his life and example, and that inspires qualities of compassion, of love and care: qualities that enrich lives and live on in the lives they touch.

Closing Prayer

God, our Father You have called us.

You have come to us in Jesus and in him have given us the true meaning of life – a life more abundant.

As we end our time of reflecting on your word we pray that we have been helped to be renewed and recommitted to follow Jesus: the light of the world

the bread of heaven
the bread of eternal life.

So may we live out our lives as he showed and taught.

Amen

With thanks to Brian Turrell for preparing today’s reflection

Sunday 22 August

Gathering

Gathering – From Psalm 84
Deep in my heart I long for your temple, and with all that I am I sing joyful songs to you.

You bless everyone who lives in your house, and they sing your praises.

You bless all who depend on you for their strength and all who deeply desire to visit your temple.

You are the shield that protects your people, and I am your chosen one.

Preparation

God, when we are discouraged and have given up hope, speak to us gently, so that our steps may not falter.

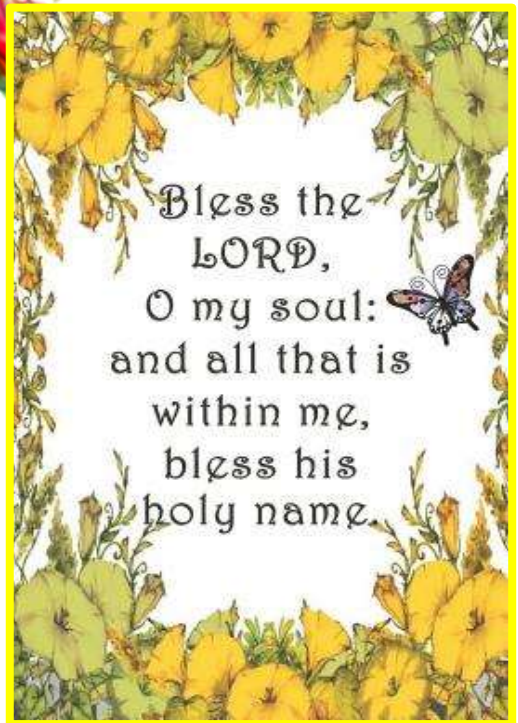
When we think we have all the answers, place your hand on our ego and open our eyes to the truth.

When we want to keep everything for ourselves, show

us there is always enough for everyone in your world.

Remind us to never stop praying, especially for others. And now, let us pray for wisdom as we think about your word and how we will respond.

Amen



Reading

John 6:56-69

Reflection

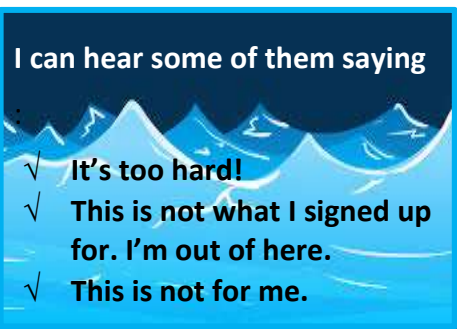
Have you ever started a project, thinking it's going to be easy, and later realised you've bitten off more than you can chew? There's a lot to be said for jumping in without knowing all the obstacles you're going to face. That way you can solve problems as they arise, and aren't so daunted by them that you don't even start. It's called stepping out in faith.

But sometimes, it comes back to bite you and you suddenly find yourself in over your head. Sometimes there's enough assistance along the way that you do achieve your goal. But sometimes, the wisest course of action is to run up the white flag of surrender, cutting your losses before they get bigger.

In the reading today, Jesus makes things a bit too real, telling the disciples how it is and how it will be. For many of them, this is the tipping point. They've been on this journey with Jesus: some probably expecting to find fame and glory

on Jesus' coattails; some looking for a way to rebel against the system; some just because they've been invited; and some because they believe the message; but most have been floating along on the current without plumbing the depths.

Now they've realised how deep the water is and they are scared.



The easy response is to jump ship and retreat, to get out while you can. I wonder how often this has been our response.

Whilst he is being a bit cryptic, Jesus is not sugar-coating things. He doesn't expect the disciples to literally eat him and drink his blood, but he does expect that they, and we, will absorb his spirit and become like him. And when we act with the same love and compassion that Jesus lived, we will find a whole new experience.

Suddenly it is not a theoretical, follow these rules, scenario. Jesus invites us to become him; to bring Jesus into our community in what we do and say, and in the way we act. Not in a “meet my friend” kind of way, but with a “meet me” attitude.

It is much easier to talk about how someone else can bring change, but when we put ourselves into the situation and personalise it, we make ourselves vulnerable. And if you’re anything like me, that is scary territory.

It’s at this point some of the disciples turned away.

What is our response?



It is not enough to say we are Christians. We must live the faith, not only with our words, but with our actions.

— Pope Francis —

A Song to sing

It only takes a spark to get a fire going,
And soon all those around can warm up in the glowing,
That’s how it is with God’s love once you’ve experienced it
You’ll spread His love to everyone, you’ll want to pass it on.

What a wondrous time is spring when all the trees are budding,
The birds begin to sing, the flowers start their blooming,
That’s how it is with God’s love once you’ve experienced it
You’ll want to sing, it’s fresh like spring, you’ll want to pass it on.

I wish for you my friend this happiness that I’ve found,
You can depend on Him, it matters not where you’re bound,
I’ll shout it from the mountain top, I want the world to know
The Lord of Love has come to me, I want to pass it on.



Closing Prayer

Lord of all life, when the going gets tough, hold our hand and walk with us so that we may not turn and run.

Give us the courage to stay the course so that others will see you.

Remind us to trust in the promise that you will fill us with all that we need to be your disciples.

Fan the flames of our faith so that we may touch others with your love.
Amen

With thanks to Carolyn Sharp for preparing today's reflection



Sunday 29 August

Prayer

We are your people.

Christ

You are God.

You are the incarnation
of the divine
the embodiment
of the love of God.

We are your people.

We give you glory
when we embody your love
and live it into the world
alongside you.

We know and confess that
as much good that we might do
we fail to live your love well
all the time.

Our action and inaction
do not bring you glory
and our worship
becomes empty and
hollow.

Forgive us and lead us back
in your way.

This we truly, humbly pray.
Amen

Preparation

This is the time of the year
when, no longer shut in by the
chills and winds of winter, we
should fling open the doors of
our hearts and minds to gather
in love and friendship with each
other; when creation is
groaning and bursting with the
new growth of spring; when the
gold of the wattles is glowing
along our roads and in our
gardens.

But we can't.

We need, in love and care and
compassion for others, to
follow the strict and confining
rules that are required to
overcome the dangers of
COVID-19.



Reading

Deuteronomy 4: 1-2, 6-9 (excerpts)

Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live ... Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” ...Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Reflection

In our humanness, we often find it so hard to stick to the rules and can fall back on the old saying, “Rules are meant to be broken”. But at a time like this we need rules. The question is, what are the rules? Who created them? And why? I’ve been reading a slim book published in 1971 called *The Story of the Bible*. The book sets out how the simplicity of the Ten Commandments was turned into thousands of rules that governed every tiny detail of the lives of the Jewish people - not by God, not through the voices of the prophets, but by Jewish theologians, human law makers. In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were the guardians and enforcers of those laws.

As far as the Pharisees were concerned Jesus’ disciples were

out and out lawbreakers: they ate their food without washing their hands. In this time of COVID restrictions we could sympathise



with the Pharisees, seeing how important it is for us to wash our hands with sanitiser and to maintain personal hygiene at home, in the name of the love we have for each other.

It was not love that drove the Pharisees.

Jesus explained - not quoting Leviticus, Deuteronomy or the Talmud, but the Prophet Isaiah – that the Pharisees were abandoning the commandments of God by enforcing human legal tradition. And remember, for Jesus, there were only two commandments that we truly need to follow.

What stops us from following those commandments doesn't involve food safety. It is some desire, some impulse, that comes from within us. Who



needs rules? Rules are there to be broken, aren't they? I have rights, don't I? Why should my life be so restricted?

And that brings us to something that is so important, so destructive of our civil liberties across the globe: the so-called right of the individual - whether the individual is a person, a group, an organisation, a nation -to dictate its particular selfishness. In stressing the rights of the individual, we have lost sight of, awareness of, and respect for community.

If the COVID restrictions have taught us anything, it is our essential need for each other.

In his letter, (James 1: 17-27), James (possibly the brother of Jesus) sums it all up when he asks us to do a bit of mental and moral housekeeping. He bids us to not just listen to the word but to do what it says. He reminds us that the religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.



So play by the rules. Accept the rules that come, not from the whims and desire for control demanded by humankind, but from God to us through the carpenter from Nazareth.

Blessing

Loving Lord, Parent, child,
spirit of life,

May we find blessing.

Let us seek that we might find.

Let us ask that we might
receive.

Let us knock that the door
might be open to us.

Let us not naively dismiss or
ignore the challenges and
hardships which we face
but guide us to take up the
power of faith and optimism
so that we might develop a
blessed mindset.

Guide us in finding blessing
in connection, relationship,
community; in loving and in
being loved; in caring and in
being cared for; in learning and
growing; in the midst of
hardship and struggle as much
as in times of joy and
accomplishment.

Bless us that we might be a
blessing and in so being, may
we find continued blessing that
rolls in a cycle of love and
grace.

Finding blessing in this, we
pray.

Amen

Prayer: Jon Humphries

With thanks to Shirley Colless for
preparing today's reflection

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