

Sermon – Trinity 12, 22 Aug 2021 St James & All Saints

John 6:56-69 You are what you eat



Well, we're back from our holidays in Cornwall, which perfectly coincided with two weeks of rain! Of course when you're on holiday you make the most regardless of the weather and so we ate well,

enjoying two popular foods - Cornish Pasties and Cream teas. I'm not going to enter the existential debate concerning which goes first - cream or jam! But it is fair to say that by the second week I was feeling as if I needed a little exercise to burn off the excess calories. So my sister helpfully suggested I join her on a gentle morning run. What I didn't realise was that we were to run 5k at 6am. Don't you just love it when you are shown up by your sister – who regularly runs 10k. 'You are what you eat', this is a popular saying and has been the title of a TV program recently about food. I am sure Jamie Oliver would agree, he has fought valiantly to reform school dinners, advocating a healthy balanced diet that is tasty and reasonably economical. I think there is a lot of truth in 'we are what we eat' - if we eat good healthy vitamin rich food then we are able to fight infection and perform mentally and physically at our best and we even look

Rev. Andrew Hiscox

well and stay reasonably trim in many cases. There is a point to all this talk about food – for food - bread and wine - feature prominently in our Bible reading today. And it's a reading that is directed as much toward us as toward its first recipients many years ago. Remember this is St John writing, brother of St James the great. He writes in Greek, which suggests he was potentially writing to Greek recipients – perhaps early Christian believers forming the first churches outside of Palestine. But John was also Jewish his familiarity with Jewish customs and traditions is also conveyed in this reading. He had been a companion of Jesus, a first-hand eyewitness and tells us the reason for his gospel is '*so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*' (John 20:31). John records Jesus saying to his Jewish hearers in the synagogue in Capernaum, '*I tell you the truth, unless you can eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you*' (v52). Clearly Jesus does not mean consuming his flesh and blood in a cannibalistic sense. So what does he mean? He means 'we are what we eat' – he is challenging us to consider what we consume and whether it is life giving or whether like too many pasties and cream teas, the things we consume or pursue are to the detriment of our spiritual health. It's human nature to want to influence the outcome of things – whether that's exam results by revision, our career path by progression, our homes by improvement, our health and weight by jogging 5k, or our spirituality by getting in God's good books. And that is exactly what many other religions try to do - Islam through its 5 pillars of pilgrimage, prayer, giving, fasting, proclamation). Buddhists with spinning prayer wheels and repetition of mantras. Even

sometimes Christianity by repetition of Hail Marys etc. And of course the Jews of Jesus' time – observing the minutiae of rules to earn God's favour. Jesus comes along and says and upsets the apple cart by saying 'No' – *'I am the living bread that came down from heaven, if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever, this bread is my flesh which I give for the life of the world'* (v51). It's not about what we can do, but only about Jesus has already done for us. We know the hearers in the synagogue found this difficult because it challenged what they had been brought up to believe: 'on hearing this, many of his disciples said, *'this is a hard teaching, who can accept it?'* (v60) and in v66 John tells us *'from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him'*. What Jesus is saying is that by our own efforts, none of us will be good enough. It's hard to hear because it means that, unlike jogging to improve out fitness, or revising for exams, or working hard to get promotion, with God, there is nothing we can do by ourselves to earn God's grace – other than to accept it is freely given to us through the death of Jesus Christ our Lord, or as today's Collect says *'through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord'*. Not even HC itself sanctifies us but instead v51 Jesus said 'I am the living bread' – HC being a symbol and remembrance of what Jesus has done.

So you're in Cornwall and You've had your cream tea. You've had your Cornish pasty. I've missed out Fish and Chips! Freshly caught fish battered and chips with salt and vinegar. Delicious as a treat. But not so good as a long-term food plan. We are what we eat. Jesus words prompt us to think about the

sustainability of what we consume. We have thought about what we consume physically, but what about what we consume environmentally? In Cornwall, when you go to places like Marazion, Bude, Sennen and Hayle, you realise how close they are to sea level. Great beaches – but are they going to be there in 100 years time? According to climate change scientists, if we carry on with our carbon consumption rate sea level will rise up to 2m over the next century. Low lying places will be first to be inundated. So today's Bible reading gives us cause to reflect on how our behaviour impacts not just ourselves but also those who come after us. The next generation. We are what we eat but they are have to live with the consequences of our consumption. So as we come to the Holy table this morning to receive Communion, let us be filled with Jesus by power of his Holy Spirit, remembering our reliance on him for God's grace and mercy, not our own works or effort, but also honouring the other mercies and gifts he has given us, such as each other and this planet. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

