

Harvest Sunday sermon by Andrew 6 Oct 2019 God is good!

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11; Philippians 4: 4-9; John 6: 25-35

And he brought us into this place, a land flowing with milk and honey

I think for all of us, food memories are some of the strongest memories we have. Richard Holloway recalls that when he was a wee boy sent to buy bread there were just two kinds on offer (I remember the same thing) – plain or pan. That was it - no bread with bits of olives or sun-dried tomatoes. Still less gluten free bread. Or anything else. But I can still remember the taste of a plain loaf – how good it was with butter and jam when you came in from school. And the wrapper was never wasted because you got your sandwiches wrapped in it.

If you ask older people for their food memories from the war they'll remember ghastly sounding things like powdered egg and tiny allowances of butter and sugar – but also that people were never healthier and morale was high. And people have the clearest memories of their first banana or their first orange after the war, things that hadn't appeared in years.

Fast forward to the seventies and people's food memories almost define that era. What were the 1970's favourites?: gammon steak and pineapple, chicken in a basket, prawn cocktail, Vesta curries, black forest gateau, Angel Delight (as mentioned by Ross last week). It's like we'd just emerged from the shadow of the post-war years many of us grew up in and suddenly there were supermarket shelves full of everything. My granny wouldn't have known what to do with a green pepper or an aubergine or pasta or rice, but suddenly we had all these things and more. An abundance, a harvest from the whole world delivered to the high street.

The Bible is full of food memories too. When the Israelites in the desert – a friend of mine calls them those whiny Israelites – finally decide that they've had enough of just manna every day, you can almost hear them salivating as they remember what they had in Egypt. "Take us back to Egypt", they demand: "Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish we ate freely in Egypt, along with the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now our appetite is gone; there is nothing to see but this manna!"

Times of abundance and times of lack both remind us of our dependence on God. Psalm 104 paints a beautiful picture of us sharing with every creature this reality of receiving what we need from God:

*You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills,  
giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst.*

*You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.*

*You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.*

*The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they withdraw and lay themselves down in their dens.*

It's almost a picture of the relationship of Eden restored. Adam is back in the garden walking with God in the cool of the day. It's a picture to restore our perspective, that sense that God is all the time sending me everything I need. In the African church there's a call and response between the minister and the congregation that underlines this truth. God is good. *All the time.* All the time? *God is good.* God is good. *All the time.* All the time? *God is good.*

This is the memory that the children of Israel are to bring to the altar. God fed us, God feeds us. God has given us everything, and everything is given in trust to be shared with the poor and the stranger.

But there's more. When we remember that God gives us everything, how can there be more than everything? But the "more than" is himself. He comes among us. When the people come to Jesus fresh from the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, they're looking for more of the same. Do it again, Master! And they remember the manna sent from heaven. Who can possibly give them more than that? But Jesus can, and you can almost hear a pin drop as he says to them: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry; whoever believes in me will never thirst."

We know those words so well, but can we hear them today as if for the first time? That the God who gives us everything, can give us more than everything by giving us himself in the most ordinary – but essential – thing we know: bread. For unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you cannot have life within you. Shift the image from bread: I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit, for cut off from me you can do nothing.

So what we're given here both in this story and on this altar is the Jesus who knows we need more than just bread; we need the bread which is his body and the wine of his new life. We need that new life flowing through us day in, day out, just as much as we need food for our bodies. And the overflow, the harvest, of this is the Christian life Paul puts before us today: Rejoice in the Lord always! Don't worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This is the Jesus who celebrates his Resurrection with a meal by the lakeside, where you can almost smell the fish frying and the aroma of freshly baked bread. Every day he gives

us a harvest of so many things; every day he gives us himself – the ultimate gift; and every day he asks of us a daily harvest of love for God and love for our neighbour. Because, let's do it again: God is good! *All the time*. All the time? *God is good*. Amen.