

"I am the bread of life".

These are Jesus' words to the crowd that has been following after him ever since they have witnessed the healing miracles that he was performing.

Since those miracles, though, Jesus has been on the move.

He goes over to the other side of the sea of Galilee and then he goes up a mountain.

And the crowds follow him.

They go up the mountain after him and he and his disciples are then faced with the problem of feeding them all - a crowd of about 5,000.

Jesus asks Philip,

"Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"

And, of course, it's a good question.

They are on a mountainside in the middle of nowhere.

There are no supplies of bread conveniently lying about.

But Jesus feeds them nonetheless.

He takes five barley loaves and two fish from a boy in the crowd, gives thanks, and then distributes them among the people.

And, miraculously, there is enough!

All who are there eat until they are satisfied.

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

Now, do you remember what happens next?

Well, in the evening Jesus' disciples get in a boat and begin to head back to Capernaum. Except...!

The wind comes up and the sea becomes rough and they are caught in a storm.

They are three or four miles out on this storm-tossed sea, when they see Jesus coming near to them, walking on the water.

And this must surely rank as one of the most terrifying and awe-inspiring moments in the Gospel narrative.

In the midst of such immediate danger,

in the midst of terror and the fear of death,

Jesus comes to them walking on the water, and brings them safely to shore.

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

And when Jesus and the disciples make it safely back to land the crowds catch up with them again.

And it is here after all of that that Jesus, actually says to them,

“I am the bread of life”.

And those words illuminate all that has gone before.

Or perhaps it's the other way around and the words are simply a summary of all that has happened previously.

Whatever the case, these words of Jesus and the events that have preceded them are meant to stir up memories within the hearts and minds of Jesus' listeners.

These words of Jesus and the events that preceded them are meant to recall a story dear to the heart of Jesus' listeners,

a story that they can now hear within the life of Jesus,
and that story is the story of the Exodus.

And the echoes are there for us to hear:

Moses leads the people of Israel out of slavery into the wilderness where God provides for their needs with manna, bread from heaven.

The crowds follow Jesus out into the wilderness where he too provides them with bread, sufficient to meet their needs, and more besides.

Moses leads the people through the waters of the Red Sea after God has made a way for them, delivering them from death.

And, are we meant to see in Jesus walking on the water in the midst of the wind and the waves and the chaos and threat of death, the same kind of deliverance?

Yes, I think so!

But it is not until Jesus says to the crowd that has followed him back from the wilderness, “I am the bread of life” that the full weight of the Exodus story is brought into Jesus' own story.

As soon as Jesus says, “I am...”, we, and the crowd, are taken back to Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush.

“Who shall I say has sent me?”, asks Moses when God tells him to go to his fellow Israelites and lead them out of captivity.

And God says to Moses,

“I AM WHO I AM.

Tell them, I AM has sent me to you”

And when God identifies Godself as “I AM”, God is declaring that all life, everything that has being, has its source in God.

When God says, “I AM” God is declaring Godself to be being itself.

Everything that *is*, comes from God.

And now Jesus is saying the same thing,

claiming his identity with God,

claiming his identity as the one who brings life,

the one “who is before all things, and in whom all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

“I am the bread of life”.

So what does this mean for us?

Well, for one thing, all of this is testimony to who Jesus is.

He is our liberator and redeemer,

the one in whom we can put our trust,

the one who will feed and sustain us in the midst of desperation,

He is the one who will give you bread to keep you going in the middle of the wilderness, wherever that place might be for you.

In the midst of storm-tossed terror when all around you is chaotic and terrifying, Jesus is the one who will bring us peace and strength.

Jesus is the bread of life and the life he shares with us is his own.

And what that also means is that every time we gather in worship, every time we share the bread and hear Jesus' words, “This is my body”, we are not only remembering these stories and the promise and the present reality that they represent, we are being formed and reformed as part of that body, the body of Christ.

In communion we take in the body of Christ, remembering all that God has done for us in and through Jesus, and we become members of that body.

We become, as we have always been, and as we will continue to be, God's work in the world.

God is at work in us and God is at work through us.

We are simultaneously a place where God is at work and a part of God's work in the lives of others.

You have heard it said,

“You are what you eat”.

Nowhere is this more true than in our sharing of the Eucharist.

You can eat an apple or a banana but you do not become one of those things.
But when we eat the bread of life, the body of Christ, then that is what we become.
When we eat the bread of life, the body of Christ, we become drawn ever more fully
into life of Christ which is given for the life of the world.