

What are we feeding on?

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Be angry but do not sin.”

“I am the bread of life.”

Powerful readings that help us reflect on recent events.

In the last couple of weeks we've seen some of the best and worst of what humanity can do.

We've seen triumphs at the Olympics; amazing feats from athletes; and an inspirational opening ceremony, celebrating the unity of diverse humanity.

And then, three days after that ceremony, we saw the terrible news of the evil attack in Southport, that claimed the lives of three young girls.

And since then, the grief of that community in Southport has been disrupted and exploited by people motivated by racism and division. People of colour and police have been attacked; shops and mosques have been destroyed; people made to live in fear. Evil spawns more evil.

We've also seen strong signs of hope. Communities have been reaching out to care for each other. From St Peter's, we contacted the Suleymaniye Mosque up the road, to send our solidarity to our Muslim neighbours.

And on Wednesday, thousands of people around the country came together to say no to the violence, no to racism; to say that does not represent who we are.

So where do we go from here?

The Church has to lead the way.

We must do. Not least because far-right figures, in Britain and globally, are adopting and misusing the symbols of Christianity for their own agenda. On social media last week, far-right agitators called on their followers to go to church – not, I think, because they actually cared about what goes on here,

or were interested in faith, but as a weapon, to say Britain is a Christian nation, and that other faiths have no place here.

Well I don't think many of them actually turned up at church.

If they had done, they would have been welcomed, because we welcome all people.

But they would also have been challenged. Because extreme Christian nationalism, where Christianity is used as a cultural identity to push down other people, is evil, and opposite to God. Racism, and white supremacy, are evil, and opposite to God. Islamophobia and antisemitism are evil and opposite to God.

In one of the oldest text we have in the New Testament, the Letter to the Galatians, which was written in a very racially divided society, St Paul declares that all people, *all* people, are one and equal because of God's love.

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

We are all one and all equal because we are all beloved children of God.

In times like this, when the world keeps forgetting it, the Church has to shout this message again and again and again.

We have to be at the front challenging injustice, including racism, whenever we see it – whether in politics, the media, or in the Church itself.

And we have to model to society a different way of being.

Because marches and condemnation of injustice only go so far. We must go further, because as St Paul reminds us, we are called to the “ministry of reconciliation”.¹ We're called to the hard work of trying to love people as God loves us.

What does that mean for us at this moment, when society's divisions are so raw?

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:18

We get some ideas from our reading from the Letter to the Ephesians, written to Christians under threat.

“Be angry but do not sin”. “Put away from you all bitterness and wrath”. “Be kind to one another, forgiving one another.”

The author’s saying – it’s okay sometimes to be angry. When we see injustice, it’s right that we get angry, because anger motivates us to action.

But we’re not to let anger curdle into wrath. Wrath is what happens when we return hate for hate; when we stop looking at those who have angered us as human.

Wrath is addictive; as the writer Elizabeth Oldfield explains, wrath is like sugar, and sometimes if we’re not careful we *feed* on it, we *crave* it because it makes us feel self-righteous – but ultimately, it poisons us.²

The risk in our current time is that we respond to the wrath of those who stoke division with wrath ourselves. We cannot allow ourselves to fall into the same trap of us v them.

If we’re to be serious about the ministry of reconciliation, we’ve got to keep asking ourselves: *what are we feeding on?* Where are we actually getting our energy from? In our polarized society, it’s all too easy for us to feed on wrath.

To be ministers of reconciliation, we’ve got to recognise when we’re tempted to feed on wrath, and turn away from it.

And we’ve got to try, as Ephesians says, to forgive one another, as God forgives us.³

That is really hard. And for some of us in pain, it will be too much for us. That is okay.

But if we find this path hard, we can pray to God for strength, to give us what we need.

So what should we be feeding on?

Jesus said “I am the bread of life.” “Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever.”

² Elizabeth Oldfield (2024) *Fully Alive: Tending to the Soul in Turbulent Times* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd), p. 40.

³ Ephesians 4:32

He's saying that the way to life in its fullness, now and eternally, is to root ourselves every day in him. To let him love us, and to try and love him back.

He says he's like manna, the bread sent from heaven as a gift to the Israelites in the desert; and the bread sent to Elijah when he'd given up hope, as a sign of God's love for him. Jesus is like that.

But he's also saying he's more than that.

"*I am* the bread of life", he says. He echoes the name of God revealed to Moses: "I am that I am" – which in Hebrew is Yahweh. Jesus is saying - here before you, God is.

And this I Am come to us, this bread of life, is broken and shared out on the cross for us, for *all* of us, in all our differences and diversity.

This is the bread we're called to feed on. We're called to root ourselves not in the ways of the world, not in tribalism and us v them and wrath, but in the love of the one who pours himself out for us.

When we come to altar today, we come to the cross, on which is broken the bread of life. We come as diverse people, with people like us and less like us; with people we like, and (sometimes) with people we like less of. But we come together, and at this table we are one and equal, because we are all loved by the God who asks us to feed on him.

And when we do so, we find the strength to go out into a divided world, and minister his reconciliation, together.

Amen.