

Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 1st August 2021
The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Collect

Gracious Father,
revive your Church in our day,
and make her holy, strong and faithful,
for your glory's sake
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Ephesians 4:1-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said,
'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
he gave gifts to his people.'

(When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

John 6:24-35

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.' Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." ' Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true

bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'

Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

Sermon by Jason Gray

Well good morning Church and I hope you are all well today!!

This morning we continue looking at the Gospel of John and we have the famous words in verse 35 about Jesus being the “**bread of life**” so John has made it very clear about the identity of Jesus and this is commonly known by the biblical scholars as Eucharistic Theology and an understanding that our celebration of the Eucharist which is so central to our faith has a wider meaning than just the events surrounding the Last Supper.

But where I want to spend my attention this morning is in one of the questions that Theresa raised last week in her sermon regarding “**what are we seeking?**”

This passage from John follows the incredible miracle of feeding the five thousand and then we are landed with this questioning from the crowds and demanding another sign to further understand the identity of Jesus and in verse 30 we have the words, “so what sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?”

It’s ironic that they witness this amazing miracle and then keep pushing and testing for further confirmation about Jesus and his identity.

In all fairness to the early Church life really had its moments and committing to a new faith whether you were Jew or Gentile must have required constant reinforcement and understanding of what they were seeking in Christianity. They really had to commit to it to make it work in sometimes very hostile environments and constant pressure from many corners to return to old ways.

If I think about the early church, they too were challenged with shifting their whole belief system very quickly into a new way of thinking and acting with the arrival of Jesus which was so radically different to the normal Jewish practices under the Law.

What they were seeking through their Christian faith was a question. They had to be fully committed given the consequences that would have for many of them and the risk of persecution and even loss of life. It was serious stuff and to survive they really had to commit to their new faith paradigm and way of life.

I guess the fact that we are here today talking about this stuff and practicing Christianity is testimony to their commitment to have complete belief in their new faith way of life.

We too have faced an incredibly challenging set of circumstances over the last 18 months with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and in many ways our inner questioning over what we are seeking have in many respects been deeply tested as we’ve had to adapt to restrictions and mentally shift our approach to things that we just took for granted. Without doubt it hasn’t been easy.

I’ll never forget one day in March of last year when the first lockdown took place and my son Paul arrived home from school to tell us that he had just been told that the following day would be his last day of Year 11.

His class like many others had been working for 3 years in order to prepare for their GCSE’s and overnight their whole focus had to be radically changed. It’s like they had to mentally pick up their home and move

overnight. He just couldn't get his head around it and like many others he was absolutely stunned. Being told that the following day would be his last at Epsom & Ewell High School is something that he was just not mentally prepared for. The dream of what he was seeking alongside his school mates had essentially been changed forever overnight.

Like many of us we all had to mentally shift very quickly leaving behind our normal working and social practices in order to survive through a lockdown way of life. It's still going on even with the current pandemic forcing thousands to self-isolate.

For some it's created new opportunities to do something new and go above and beyond to help others.

I've been watching the One Show on BBC1 on a Thursday evening and I get full of emotion watching them give a special thank you to someone in the community who has gone above and beyond to help their neighbours and community through these challenging days with a special act of kindness and love. Sometimes I just well up in tears as they go about seeking to bring love and generosity to those who really need it in these tough days.

For the majority it has been a real chore and it's going to take time to "**find our feet**" again and pick up where we left off as life starts to calm down.

So, the question is how we find what we are seeking again?

Just like that early Church that seemed to be after constant reassurance about the identity of Jesus even in the face of constant miracles so how do we go about finding and nurturing our faith when times get tough?

Well, I'm sorry I don't have the big answers to that one but without doubt little steps of extra prayer time or even picking up an extra Bible reading from time to time will go a long way to helping us find peace and understanding and helping us get back or keep us on that "faith bike" and assurance for what we are seeking in the presence of the God who loves us.

I can't tell you how important these little steps are and what an impact they can have on your life. The steps don't need to be big and I promise you they really do feed us!

After working from home for 16 months I just had to do something about it. It was truly driving me mad and probably Erica too. Early calls and spending 20 hours a day in my loft had driven me completely mad. I was desperately seeking my work normality.

4 weeks ago I reached out to start returning to our office as some of you will know. Work approved my application and I've now returned two days a week to the office.

It's felt like the weight has been taken off my shoulders and as I entered the office for the first time I was just overwhelmed with this sense of peace and calmness. I had been seeking this for the last 16 months and now it was returning!

I guess small steps help us move closer to what we are really seeking and needing to sustain us so as we go about life this week take some time out to think and pray about what will help you find that special place in the love of our God and Father who wants us to keep seeking Him and all He brings like that special bread from Heaven.

In the name of Jesus. **Amen**.