

Sermon Preached at St Mark's Fitzroy in the Diocese of Melbourne
4 August 2024 (Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost / 18th Ordinary Sunday)
Dr Murray Harvey, Bishop of Grafton



— I am the Bread of Life by Kennedy A Paizs. "I want to desire Jesus as much as I desire to eat each day to sustain my physical life."

Australian Nurse Bronnie Ware* recently recorded in a Blog the things she has learned from seriously ill patients over the years.

As they looked back over their lives, many reflected that they wished they had:

Lived their lives true to themselves. According to Ware, when people look back clearly on their life they often realise they have been seeking to meet the expectations of others rather than to be the person they felt called to be. This was the first regret of many.

Secondly, to spend more quality time with family and friends.

Thirdly, to nurture and maintain friendships rather than to let golden friendships slip by over the years.

Finally, to allow themselves to be happy. Often we feel we can't be happy until tomorrow when we have reached this goal for that milestone, but we should realise happiness is a choice that we can make now.

While these reflections and learnings are not from a specifically Christian perspective, they are deeply human, and emphasised that material things are not the things that bring fulfilment and true happiness. Being true to oneself, spending time with those dear to us, nurturing friendships, making a choice for happiness. These are the things that nurse Bronnie Ware found as the wisdom of her patients.

Some verses from today's gospel:

Jesus says, *you are looking for me not because you saw the signs but because you had your fill of the loaves* (v26).

do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures (v27).

for the bread of God gives life to the world (v33).

they said give us this bread always (v34).

Jesus knew that the crowd was seeking something:

They followed him after the feeding of the 5000

Were they seeking material comfort? He seems to think that they might have been - that they were fixated on their desire for food that perishes.

This encounter takes us back to Jesus' opening words to his first disciples in John Chapter 1 (1:38).
What are you looking for?

This encounter also addresses what some see as the three the seminal questions of John's Gospel: Who is Jesus? What to desire and work for? What is lasting and endures?

In other words, where should their energies be focused? What should be their priorities?

Such questions are relevant for us too, in our lives, where should our desires and energies be focused? I'm not sure about you but the deeply human insights from Nurse Ware's patients certainly resonated with me. We appreciate their wisdom, many were elderly and speaking from long life experience. What changes should we make to our lives today in response to the Gospel?

So Jesus words in John 6:27 speak to us today:

Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life which of the son of man will give you for it is on him that God the father has set his seal.

This is a sort of summary of John's Gospel through the imagery of food, in the light of the recent feeding of the 5000. To restate it in more general terms, we might say, *do not work for the things that perish, but for the things that endure for eternal life which of the son of man will give you, for it is on him that God the father has set his seal.*

The imagery of the seal stood out for me when I read this again the other day.

As Bishop I have a seal, a wax seal, with the diocesan crest on it, which is embossed onto official documents like licences and letters of orders. I also have to use the Corporate Trustees seal which is placed on contracts of sale or purchase, leases, and deeds.

The seal assures the other parties that the document is genuine, authentic, it can be trusted and believed. It's safe.

It is on Jesus that God the Father has set his seal.

I am the bread of life, says Jesus. Because God has set his seal on him, Jesus is the authentic bread, the true life, given by the father.

The pivotal verse of this whole sermon dialogue is the last verse of today's Gospel (v35): *I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*

So Jesus is this true life that is offered by the Father, the one who is to be desired utterly. All other desires and priorities pale into insignificance. As the crowd proclaimed, *Sir, give us this bread always!*

As we consider this Gospel reading, Jesus' early question for the first disciples at the beginning of John's Gospel is also a question for us. What are we looking for?

I'm sometimes invited to welcome candidates into a process of preparation for their Confirmation or Reception. Sometimes it's called the Catechumenate.

They're asked the question: *What do you seek?*

They answer: *Renewal of my life in Christ.*

What does this new life in Christ look like for you?

Even if you gave your life to Christ many years ago, how do you renew that commitment? How do you ensure that daily you are focused, not on the food that perishes, but on him, the food that endures?

And it's in those things that the patients spoke about, such as being true to oneself and to God – to be the person God has called us to be, in sharing the love of family and friends, being available to others as one who serves, nurturing trusting relationships and leading a grateful life – in these things the love of Christ abides and endures.

Let's give ourselves again to him today - to his enduring love - and as the Letter to the Ephesians challenges us, *clothe ourselves daily in the new self, created according to the likeness of God* (Ephesians 4:24).

A Prayer

Almighty God who hast given to thy people the true bread from heaven, even thy son Jesus Christ, grant that our souls may be so fed by him who giveth life unto the world that we may be made strong for thy service and share with others that which we have so richly received, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Parish Prayers, Frank Colquhoun

*Nurse Bronnie Ware, *Regrets of the Dying*. bronnieware.com