**Worship sheet for Sunday 21st February 2021 (First Sunday in Lent)**

**Compiled by Rev. Pam Siddall of Buckden Methodist Church**

**Call to Worship:** Loving Lord God**,** in our worship today, give us, we pray, our daily bread. **Amen**

**Introduction:** Throughout the season of Lent we are invited as a circuit to follow, both in our Sunday services and Lent study groups, the theme of some of the ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus in John’s gospel based on Andrea Skevington’s book, ‘Jesus said, “I Am”.’ Today we hear Him say, “I am the Bread of Life.” Maybe you could place some nice bread on the table in front of you as you as you continue this act of worship.

**Hymn:** *read, sing or find on You Tube -*  StF 568; H&P 592: Alleluia, sing to Jesus (NB v. 3 ‘Bread of angels’)

**Prayers:** Father God, you are our maker and the provider of all good gifts. **We praise and thank you Lord.**

In Jesus, our lives are nourished in body, mind and spirit. **We praise and thank you Lord.**

By your Holy Spirit you continue to feed us with the gifts of grace. **We praise and thank you Lord.**

Nourishing God, you gave life to all that exists and provided for all needs in a just world, yet many are starving this very day both for physical food and spiritual sustenance. We confess that we, your church, have failed adequately to obey your command and example of loving and feeding our neighbours (both nearby and across the world) in body, mind and spirit. We are truly sorry and ask that we may again hear your loving words of forgiveness and feel equipped and inspired to serve you more fully in reaching out to others at this needy time in the life of the world.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Reading: John 6, 1-15 and 25-35** Our next hymn asks God to open the scripture to our understanding.

**Hymn:** *read, sing or find on You Tube -* StF 153; H&P 467: Break thou the bread of life, O Lord, to me

**Background:** Mark’s gospel, set in the lectionary for the first Sunday of Lent this year, would have lead us to consider Jesus’ baptism and the temptations in the wilderness, where, in Matthew and Luke’s version, he refused to sate his hunger or gain fame by turning stones into bread, for: “one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”. In John’s gospel, we see no wilderness temptation but instead, Jesus resisting the crowd’s vision of him as an earthly king with a free food supply. For John, Jesus is God’s “Word made flesh” who “came to dwell among us” (chapter 1) and today’s story illustrates his very nature as Messiah. John calls it, not a miracle, but a ‘**sign**’ of who he is. He is the Bread of Life for all who will believe, but what does this mean?

**Reflection:** Spend a little time prayerfully considering the bread you have before you. Think how important it is and what it means to you. It is your basic, staple, daily sustenance; ordinary, yet so important to our well-being. Think about how it is made. In our household, my husband makes all our bread by hand and so we are conscious of the good grain that makes the flour, sorted, ground down and prepared; the yeast living and growing within the dough; the water to moisten and salt to flavour it, the kneading, the proving, the waiting and the delicious smells of the baking. Take a little piece of your bread to eat and notice the flavour, the texture. Take time to enjoy it. Think of the energy this nourishment will give you.

How might this awaken our understanding of Jesus? Think of the 30 years of preparation before his ministry began. Think of the affirmation of his Father God at his baptism in the Jordan – the good grain; the beloved son alive with the yeast of the Spirit. Think of the demands of his earthly ministry, his suffering and death on the cross; the kneading, the proving but yet the rising, all of this in order that we might be fed and nourished and saved by Him.

**A prayer of Charles de Foucauld** (1858-1916) “You desire me, O Lord, to look to you for my every need and I know that you will provide me with bread to eat, clothes to wear and a warm place to rest. But…. you give also the spiritual bread. Whenever I eat the bread of Holy Communion, I am reminded that your Son gave his body to die on the cross, to give me spiritual food for all eternity. I note that (in the Lord’s Prayer) it is not ‘me’ for whom I pray, but ‘us’. You do not want me ever to pray selfishly but always to pray for others’ needs, because only through such mutual charity do I become fit to receive the bread of eternal life.”

**Food for thought from our Bible Reading:**

We are hungry, needy people: Like the crowd in our story, we, in these difficult times, find ourselves in the wilderness, in need of healing and sustenance. *This Lent*, are we committed to following him closely and watching

where he leads? Are we relying utterly his abundant giving, eternal, daily bread? (In the Lord’s Prayer Jerome –c.324-420 - translated the Greek word ‘epiousios’ which we call ’daily’ as “bread for essential being”) The crowd said’ “Give us this bread always.” Are we willing to deepen our understanding by on-going study even when we learn, like the crowd, that his purpose differs from our expectation?

We have a calling: Jesus asked Philip to think for himself, then Andrew got involved, then a small boy made his little offering. *This Lent*, are we listening to what God asks of us? Are we willing to get involved? Are we offering whatever we have available so that Jesus can make it enough for his kingdom purposes?

Acting like Jesus: Note the actions of Jesus. He **took** what was offered. He **gave thanks to God.** He **broke** the bread.He **distributed** the food, offered that bounty to all. Note that these actions are at the heart of services of Holy Communion. *This Lent*, consider: do we gracefully receive all that God offers? How can we show that we are truly thankful? How can we more fully share his bountiful gifts both materially and spiritually?

Disciples are provided for: Christian living makes demands on us. Sometimes we seem to be continually giving out and sometimes we feel tired and empty. When Jesus calls us to give out, he also provides for us: for 12 disciples, there were 12 basketsful left over. *This Lent* take time to allow Jesus to re-equip you and build you up for the tasks he has in store.

Look to the future; don’t dwell in the past: The crowd looked back to the time of Moses with rose-tinted spectacles, demanding mana in their own wilderness without understanding its real meaning. *This Lent* we are in a very changed world from a year ago. Let us refrain from looking back with longing to church as it was, (not always perfect after all, if we’re honest) but bravely take time to imagine how God might want us to go forward and feed the crowd in new ways with him. Shall we offer ourselves to the Lord to take us, to break and mould us and offer us to his needy world and shall we give thanks to him at all times and in all circumstances? May we say, with Charles Wesley - “What shall I render to my God for all his mercy’s store? I’ll take the gifts he has bestowed and humbly ask for more. The sacred cup of saving grace I will with thanks receive, and all his promises embrace, and to his glory live.”

AMEN

**Hymn**: *read, sing or find on You Tube -* StF 238; H&P 68: Lead us Heavenly Father (guard us, guide us , keep us, **feed** us)

**Prayers for Others:** We remember before God all whose stomachs are empty: the homeless, the refugees; those whose hard work hsimply doesn’t earn enough to put food on the table. We commend to your care the work of food banks and those who supply and staff them. We pray for those in government at any level and in all countries that they may strive to bring about a just and equal sharing in our societies. **Bread of Heaven, feed us now and evermore.**

We remember before God those whose spirits are empty: the hopeless and those who feel themselves to be beyond redemption, knowing no faith, having no future hope; ignorant of the free gifts of your grace to those who believe. May they find fulness of life in the good news of Jesus.**Bread of Heaven, feed us now and evermore.**

We remember before God those whopse hearts are empty and yearning: the bereaved, the heart-broken, the lonely and isolated and all who long to hug and be hugged once more. May these voids be ffilled with the love, the hope and the grace of the Lord Jesus. **Bread of Heaven, feed us now and evermore.**

We remember before God the world-wide church and ourselves as disciples within that family. Like Philip and Andrew, may we hear your challenge. Like the small boy, may we offer our meagre resources freely to you so that you may ,make them amply sufficient for service in your kingdom. Like the crowd around Jesus, may we find ourselves richly fed and be truly thankful. Like the disciples of old, may we discover basketsful of resources to sustain us after all the needy are fed. May we be revitalised for on-going ministry in your name. **Bread of Heaven, feed us now and everymore. Amen**

**Hymn:** *read, sing or find on You Tube -* StF 465; H&P 437: Guide me O thou great Jehovah

**Benediction: God of all grace, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, unite your scattered people under the umbrella of your blessing until we can meet again. We ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.**