

## Deuteronomy 26. 1-11

When you have entered the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, take some of the first fruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name and say to the priest in office at the time, “I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.” The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God. Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me.” Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him. Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.

## John 6. 25-35

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

.....  
**““My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there”**

It seemed very important to the Hebrews to remember where they had come from - my ancestor was a wandering Aramean. That each year they perform this ceremony of first fruits.

That when it was a bad year - they were reminded that God had looked after them and brought them out of slavery. However bad things seemed, it was better than when they were slaves, and God was still looking out for them, with them, in it.

Even more important to remember when things are going well. Its still all from God.

The writers of this liturgy - wanted to pass on the gratitude they felt.

I wonder what are we passing on.. Our faith, our belief? Our church, our building?

Literally - have you made a will? I realise none of us know how much we'll have left when the time comes, but could you spare some amount for St James? One of the things that has kept St James going is the generosity of people in their will. I know its hard, everyone wants some, will I have enough?.. but the thing about the wandering Aramean annual festival is that it is of 1st fruits, not at the end of the harvest!

They are giving the first bits - trusting God for the remainder. This is not the surplus or skimmed off after they put aside what they needed. They are giving the first bits to God, as a symbol that it all belongs to God.

They are trusting in God's generosity. They declare his generosity by their act of faith.

And God is so generous

He has given us **creation**. And beautiful it is too!

He has given us a relationship with him - we can be friends with God

**“Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called children of God.” – 1 John 3.1**

He has given us teh Gift of **Jesus Christ**

God became human, living among us, knowing what human struggle and joy and life is really like. We can be understood, and not only is our humanity made more special by having been inhabited by God, God is changed by our flesh forever being part of the godhead.

And Jesus has given us **life**, life in all its fulness, life in abundance.

**I am the bread of life...**

We are so blessed to live in the countryside, God's beautiful creation, and to see, very concretely, where our food comes from. Unlike in a city, many of us can grow our own, pick our own, or at the least, see it being harvested around us, and driven down our streets and past our doors on wonderful tractors. But however this food comes to us, and whether we just pick it off the shelves of the co-op, we need the harvest to survive.

When Jesus says he is the Bread of life, he is saying 2 things. You need him like you need food, you need him like a staple, like something you have every day. And if you don't get him every day.. your life is in jeopardy

Secondly.. the bread does not run out - like manna in the wilderness, God provided, so Jesus will never run out. God gives us what we need - Jesus, and he gives it in abundance, pressed down, overflowing, pouring over.. more than enough...

God's generosity.. and there's more...

Jesus **setting us free** from guilt and sin by his death on the cross.

God **sending his Holy Spirit** with the gifts of the spirit.

And the **gift of eternal life**.

And if our God is this generous.. what does that mean for us..?  
We who are Created in God's Image?

One of my favourite bits of theology -

We bear the maker's mark, we are **Christ's ambassadors, representing the kingdom**.

**We show people what God is like.**

So why do we forgive others? Because God forgives others

Why do we love our neighbours and our enemies, because God does.

Why do we treat all people equal, or stand up for the poor and oppressed - because God does.

Why do we treat all humans as having value and worth? Because God does.

So if our God is generous, generous, generous - what should we be?  
Generous!

Generous with love, with mercy, with time, with our possessions, with the fruits of our labour. Our first fruits, and our harvest.  
In other words - our money.

If we realise that God gives to us so generously, all the time.

And we believe that he's going to continue to do that  
Then we shouldn't be so worried about running out.  
And we can be a little freer in our generosity to others.

As a church we don't have a lot of money to throw around. We don't break even every month. But we do believe in God's generosity and fairness, And we feel called to employ an administrator and a children and families worker. And we want to pay them fairly. So we're are giving them, subject to PCC on Tuesday, a 4% pay rise (last year pension rose 6%, this year they will rise 8%).  
I wonder if you can help by raising your giving by 4%

But I want to you think - that if God is so generous, and I'm called to be generous too,

Then think

What do I do with my gifts and resources?

What do I do with the gifts that God has given me?

What does God want me to do with what God has given me?

What does God want me to give from what God has given me?

What does God want me to keep from what God has given me?.

And our giving might mean lots of things:

It might be a response to God's generosity to us - he's given me, I'm giving

It might be a gift of love - to people, or things, I want to show them worth, bless them

It might be a priority to something we value - I want that charity to carry on, or that church

It might express a commitment as disciples - I am being obedient, I am being faithful, I know I'm following God because I give my 10%

It might be an act of worship or devotion.

When you put money in the envelope, or sign that direct debit, or tap in on your phone or card - all these things are happening.

"When you have entered the land that the Lord your God has given you..  
take some of the first fruits of all that you produce ... and put them in a basket.  
say to the priest in office at the time,

"My ancestor was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation..

now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me."

Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him.

Then you, and the Levites, and the foreigners dwelling among you, shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household."