

SERMON

Fr. Richard Springer

Rector of St George-in-the-East

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

There's a little song which says, Jesus is the answer, for the world today. Above Him there's no other, Jesus is the way.

For me, He will always be the answer. But the question for many who follow the way and for many who look on, is, 'So which Jesus is this that we are talking about?'

The celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi – which means the Lord's Body – is an opportunity to again look at Jesus.

The little song may be simple but it recaptures His words from John's Gospel. Where Jesus says, "I am the living bread... the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." He gave of Himself, His body broken for the life of the world and all people in it. He institutes this Holy Communion of himself broken and poured out for the world on the eve of His brutal death, and we are called upon in the letter of St Paul to the Corinthian church, to gather around breads broken and wine poured out and to 'do this in remembrance of Him'.

In this period immediately after we celebrate Pentecost – when the followers of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit – we can so easily forget the bodily necessities of our Christian faith. We can forget that the Spirit comes to bind us together and not tear us apart. To fulfil in us the work of the cross. So, when we work against the value of another person or stand on the other side of the road while someone suffers we reject Pentecost and the work of the Spirit in us and in the church.

In this season the Feast of Corpus Christi is a reminder of our bodily faith. It is tradition in many parishes to process into the streets around the church with the blessed sacrament held aloft in public adoration. Many may find this odd. But in essence as His followers we should be seeking ways for braving His body in the neighbourhood. Would it be that we could show that Jesus came and dwelt among us in flesh and blood, in a particular place and in a particular body.

The breaking of bread, the breaking of the living bread is a healing balm to the sores of injustice. As we've heard from Jusna the feeding of the homeless in Shadwell through The Open Table ministry is a communal event. The meal is often shared in the round rather than in a queue. All are seen and faces have names. This relational act of bodies sharing space changes entirely the possibility for creating the world as it should be in the here and the now.

When the most affordable supermarkets and discount stores are left out of the free school meal voucher scheme, in the neighbourhoods that need them the most it is another instance of a failure to actually see what people face day to day.

We need to be reminded that it is hunger in the physical body that is on the line again. At St George's we try, with many others, like Bethan from St Mary's Cable Street, to challenge these injustices and others as a consequence of what Jesus himself taught and did.

The outcome of the greatest acts of wickedness in the world is the disembodiment of it and the people in it. The separation of bodies be it intentionally or because of lazy ignorance add up to the same sin. We see we become disconnected from one another and even from recognising the beauty of ourselves. Jesus comes and has offered Himself as a way of reconnection. But the One who put His body in harm's way, His way is not a shortcut to peace and reconciliation. And that is the Jesus that I'm talking about.

The Jesus who put His physical body on the line. And when that body gave out its last breath on the Cross, the heavens shook, with deep anguish and with anger but also with the rumblings of the beginnings of a new creation. It's that brave and powerful Jesus who is the way.

I with many people I know, physically shook with anguish and anger when viewing the death of George Floyd and the countless others killed at the hands of the authorities. Jesus' body suffered in the same way, choking on the Cross. He was despised and spat upon in the same way as two Londoners, Trevor Belle, a taxi driver and Belly Mujinga, a railway station worker who both later died of the coronavirus after being terrorised in wicked acts by people who chose not to truly see them in their black physical selves and in their beauty.

The Church participates in denying that God in Jesus suffered his body to be broken if we always skip the part human frailties that we share, play in His death. If we just rush to Easter morning, we too risk repeating the atrocities on the very bodies He died for.

When we reduce our attention on the Lord's body to a private or an inconsequential act it is as if He wasn't crucified, his body broken in public for us all. It is that body broken, and the body and blood shared in consecrated bread and wine which is "true food and true drink". It is our sustenance when wickedness dries our thirst for justice and peace.

About twenty years ago now in Birmingham I heard the finest sermon I have ever heard. It was preached with power, authority and wisdom by Pastor Ruthlyn Bradshaw a minister in the New Testament Assembly. The sermon was called 'The bread is enough'. Pastor Bradshaw had arrived in the UK from the tiny Caribbean island of Montserrat. She was in the UK because a handful of years before I heard the sermon her homeland was decimated by a huge volcanic eruption. It rendered whole streets invisible – buried under rubble and lava.

Despite all this destruction, the scattering of her people across the globe including her. The disconnection those people felt at being separated by death and distance from loved ones – into this abyss the Pastor stared and concluded that in spite of it all, 'the bread is enough' for He is the living bread – that restores our bodies and our souls. That is the Jesus we that need, the one who always meets us in our darkest hour.

In the face of racism, never-ending and wilful failure to address racism, violent authorities, the intimidation of the weak, hunger in the richest nations in the world, homelessness next to unnecessarily expensive and empty property, even when looking at the destruction of a volcanic eruption, the living bread is enough. His body has braved entanglement in this world and survived its hardest blows, we now being the body of Christ need not fear but tread His way knowing that Jesus is our healing balm. Jesus is our justice and Jesus is our answer.

Amen.