

USPG All-age service

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the signs of your goodness surrounding us today. Help us to use our time here to praise you for your greatness; to be inspired by your word; to pray for others in your world and to give ourselves afresh to you.

Amen.

Hymn: Lord you created a world rich in splendour or O give thanks (Graham Kendrick)

This would be a good time to invite your congregation to bring forward any harvest gifts.

Activity

Give your congregation a bread quiz to see how many different types of bread they can recognise. You could bring in a variety of loaves (eg pitta bread, ciabatta, bloomer) and mix up some labels for volunteers to sort; hold them up and ask for suggestions or provide anagrams to be decoded.

Praise about what Jesus is like

After the quiz, explain that Jesus told his followers: 'I am the bread of life'.

Ask the congregation:

'Why do you think Jesus called himself the bread of life?'

Display their answers so that everyone can see. Use their ideas to stimulate a time of praise beginning with the words:

'I thank you, Jesus, that you are like bread because...'

If your congregation is comfortable with it, you could ask them to call out phrases at random or you could lead each phrase and ask the congregation to respond with words such as:

'We thank you Jesus.'

Finish this time with a hymn of praise such as:

Hymn: Jesus is Lord or Jesus is the name we honour

The reading: John 6:25-35

It's important to explain the context of this reading, so remind your congregation that shortly before Jesus said these words he had fed 5,000 people. You could perhaps ask the children if they can tell you the story of the loaves and fishes. Explain that, after feeding them, Jesus had dispersed the crowd, but they pursued him, wanting more.

He then used these words to try and explain to the people who he really was.

This reading will be more effective if dramatised: either use a chorus to speak together as the crowd (this will need some careful rehearsal beforehand) or use four separate people to ask the 'crowd' questions, and a man to be Jesus.

All-Age Talk

You will need: a loaf of bread; an apron; a mixing bowl; a wooden spoon; a laptop/briefcase or similar; a mobile phone.

Begin with two chairs near a table on which is a loaf of bread.

B: *(entering)* Mmm. What a beautiful smell. I love the smell of fresh bread. I think I'll sit here and enjoy the smell.

A (Kevin): *(Entering)* What a lovely looking loaf. Just the sort of shape I like. I think I'll sit and appreciate its artistic form.

Priest: *(Entering)* Hello. What are you two doing?

A: Admiring the bread.

P: Pardon.

B: Don't you think it smells amazing?

P: Well, yes, but...

A: And its shape is wonderful, so homely and comforting.

P: What *are* you on about?

A: As we said, we're admiring the loaf.

P: But bread isn't to be admired! It's for eating.

(Breaks a piece off and hands to A and B)

Here, try some.

A: Wow, this is better than it looks.

B: And even better than it smells. Can I have some more?

P: Go ahead.

(A and B gather round the table with their backs to the congregation, munching happily on the loaf)

B: Mmm, very satisfying. What do you think?

A: I agree. Very satisfying.

P: Um, are you two just going to sit there and scoff all that yourselves?

A: Don't see why not, it's very satisfying.

B: Is there a problem?

P: Well... *(indicates to assembled congregation)*

B: Oh, sorry, we've got our backs to them.

P: That's not quite what I meant!

B: Well, what did you... oh, I get it.

(A and B hand some of the bread round to the congregation for those who want some)

The Talk continues:

P: (addressing congregation): Jesus' miracle with the loaves and fishes amazed people and left 5,000 satisfied customers. But, as so often happened, Jesus' miracle was misunderstood. The people had thought it was brilliant and chased after Jesus wanting more – but it seems that most of them didn't want more of Jesus, just more free food. It's a bit like our two friends with their loaf of bread. First they were just interested in the bread on the outside. They were attracted by it, but they didn't go any further. Then they ate some and found it 'very satisfying'. Jesus told the crowd that whoever came to him, the Bread of Life, would never be hungry or thirsty again.

Just think about it. Jesus gives you everything you need. But Jesus doesn't make promises to us so that we can be selfish and self-satisfied. Do we really want to try and keep all Jesus' goodness to ourselves? Or are we going to learn, like our two friends did, that it's better to share? The challenge is this: what can we bring to help spread Jesus' love? He told the crowds that he came to give life to the whole world – what can we give back to the world to help spread the good news of Jesus? Well, we've made a start with the harvest gifts we've brought today.

(While you're looking at the harvest gifts A and B reappear. A is dressed in an apron and carrying a mixing bowl and spoon, B is carrying a laptop or briefcase and mobile phone.)

P: Oh hello. What are you two up to now?

B: Well, we were so inspired by the bread that we ate, that we wanted to share it with as many others as possible.

A: Yes, I've always been a good cook so I've learned the recipe so I can make a lot more loaves.

B: And I'm using my IT skills to promote the loaf. I've designed a website, tweeted about it, put it on my Facebook page and in my blog. And people want to know more. Lots of people are ordering the loaf to give to others. *(A and B exit)*

P: Well, it's good to know that those two weren't just a greedy pair. They were 'very satisfied' with the bread and they've used their skills and time to share it with others.

(Show the USPG Harvest film/slides. Ask children to observe the different ways that people in Tanzania share and have feedback afterwards.)

P: The people in Tanzania, despite their poverty, are filled with the Bread of Life and so are giving back to Jesus to help him fill others. And we can do the same. Just like the lad who gave Jesus his lunch and he fed 5,000 people – if we have the trust to give Jesus our money, skills or time then he can multiply what we give.

So: what can you bring?

Encourage your congregation to think about what they could bring to God. Explain that there will be an opportunity to respond later in the service.

Hymn: *I am the bread of life* or *Think of a world without any flowers*

Confession

This confession could be read by the service leader or other members of the congregation.

*Invite the congregation to respond to Please Lord with **Forgive us and help us.***

L: Lord God, you've given us this beautiful world filled with so much goodness, but we often take it for granted and forget to say thank you. Please Lord:

All: Forgive us and help us.

L: Lord God, we have so many good things, yet sometimes we forget to share what we have with others. Please Lord:

All: Forgive us and help us.

L: Lord God, you made us to be people who care for others, but so often we are selfish and careless. Please Lord:

All: Forgive us and help us.

L: Lord God, we need you in our lives to guide and help us, but sometimes we behave as if we know better than you. Please Lord:

All: Forgive us and help us.

L: Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life who came down from heaven to give us new life by forgiving our sins and making us ready to serve him. May we know the joy of sins forgiven and hope restored.

All: Thanks be to God. Amen.

Invite the congregation to remain in an attitude of prayer as others lead the following prayers (ideally led by a family or a mix of ages)

Prayers

Lord Jesus, we thank you for being the Bread of Life and giving us all we need. We thank you for our food and clothing and for our families and friends and all the fun and happiness we can enjoy together. Amen.

Lord, we have so much, while others in the world have so little. Help us to share what we have: our wealth, our skills, our time and our friendship with those in our church, our community and across the whole world. And we pray for the people who will be receiving the harvest gifts that we have brought today. **Amen.**

Father God, we pray for the Sisters of the Community of Saint Mary in Tanzania and thank you for the support they give to their community. We pray for those struggling to live with the little that they have. Help us not to forget that others have a much harder life than we do. Inspire us to do all we can to help them. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

We close our prayers with the words Jesus taught us which begin Our Father...

Opportunity for response

With: a circle of paper (to represent a loaf) and use of a pencil for each member of the congregation.

Encourage your congregation to think of what they could bring to God in response to today's service. If they wish, they could write that on their piece of paper (anonymously if they choose). If they want to keep the matter private between themselves and God then they could just use a blank piece of paper. Invite everyone to place their 'loaf' on the collection plate as it goes past as a sign of self-giving. Make sure people are aware that this is optional and you will not read their pieces of paper afterwards.

Alternatively they can take their 'bread' home as a sign that they want to pray about it some more.

Play some music while they are thinking and writing and then lead in to a hymn of offering such as:

We plough the fields and scatter or Praise and thanksgiving Father we offer

Final words of praise and blessing

Father we thank you for your goodness to us. Now we give back to you what we have and what we are. Please take these gifts that we have offered and use them for your glory.

And the blessing....

Closing hymn:

Now thank we all our God