



Rev Diana Rattray
Ordinary bread

Ephesians 4: 24-5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

Year B 19th Sun in Ordinary Time

8 August 2021

When Lisa Carrington won her 5th Gold medal on Thursday she was described as kiwi, New Zealander and most successful Olympian of all time. The adjectives we heard less were Maori, woman, from Aotearoa. Cognisant of some of the debate we have heard bandied around by some politicians this week. What I saw in Lisa was human strength at its best, and so much hard work and pain put in before and during the race.

When we ask a family member, can you please pick up a loaf of bread on the way home from work? it is a very different response than from when I was a child buying the white crusty loaf wrapped in white paper from the local dairy. Now clarification is needed, multigrain, gluten free, toast slice, pita – all bread but in so many different flavours and forms.

The gospel begins with the words we heard last week. Jesus said I am the bread of life, Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

But those who knew Jesus, who had seen his miracles, who regarded him as a teacher, now come and complain. How can he be the bread of heaven? He grew up round here, he is just like us, he is common.

When people are in times of need or when life is not going how they think it should, they often want to see or experience a God who comes with strength and through miracles. A God who answers clearly and quickly. A God who is there.

The crowds are offended that Jesus makes the claim of being the bread from heaven. God would have nothing to do with the

ordinary, the mundane, the everyday on earth with ordinary people. They know his father Joseph and Joseph's lineage, how dare Jesus claim to be the manna, the bread from heaven.

How can someone who is like them, ordinary, make a difference for them? I suspect we are not that different. I know I live each day thinking about how fragile the foundation we lay our faith on is.

As I hear the experiences of women, men and children who are caught in the complexity of family violence I doubt my own ability to make a difference. There are amazing advocates and good support structures and I play a part in community education yet I wonder if what I say and do is really that effective in the big scheme of things?

The same when we look at inequity within our social structure and the growing gap between home owners and renters and renters and the unhoused. The scale of need can be totally overwhelming and what we can do or offer at times seems so insignificant or small.

When Jesus talks about being the bread of life, the thirst quencher. He reminds us that bread and wine are ordinary. Common, mundane, barely worthy of God's use.

But that is the point God uses the ordinary things, the basic white crusty loaf, the common elements, to work towards seeing God's love manifest in our world.

Jesus was both common, ordinary, mortal like you and me, and yet he was also uncommon, divine, the Son of God. Jesus lived out the counter cultural - for what is expected from the powerful comes in weakness. Where we look for God to come in power, God comes in vulnerability;

Where the divine is sought in justice and righteousness it is often found in forgiveness and mercy.

This is the claim and promise Jesus makes today:

that God became incarnate; that is, became carnal, took on flesh, became just like us, because of God's love for all people whatever their race, sexuality, gender, disability or any other point of difference.

The carnal God; the God who does not despise the ordinary and common seeks the ordinary out to achieve God's will. It is this promise that rests behind the sacraments.

In the sacraments we find God's promise to take hold of us and make us God's own, to remain with us and to never let us go.

But we also find in the sacraments another promise which God makes to us.

It is the promise not only to redeem us, but also to use us – to make use of our skills and talents, inadequate or insufficient though they may seem. To use us to continue God's work of creating, redeeming, and sustaining all that is. And that is an incredible promise.

Lisa Carrington was assisted in winning her Olympic golds by wearing a speed suit, having the best boat and paddle, phenomenal coaching and support teams but none of that is enough on its own. Her whakapapa, her genetic make-up, her dedication, hard work and mental toughness brought her from ordinary to extraordinary.

God works through you and me.
God works through technology and instruments,
through bottom-line corporations and imperfect labour unions,
through ordinary, human, doctors and nurses.
God works through vicars, jaded teachers,
worn-out secretaries, over-worked government officials,
exhausted parents, artists, and the retired.

God uses us and so many other unlikely people to work, even when we don't suspect it.

For just as God uses ordinary bread and wine to bring to us God's acts of redemption, God also uses each of us to accomplish God's will and work in God's world. It can be hard at times to believe that and know that. But that is why we receive the sacrament. At the altar we are fed through body and blood, bread and wine.

God's promise of forgiveness and acceptance, of wholeness and of life, is given to each of us in a form we not only can hear, but also see, taste, touch, and feel. The sacraments bid us to raise our eyes from the confusion and ambiguity of life for a moment, so that we may receive God's audacious and faith-provoking promises and thereby return to our lives in this confusing world with courage and hope.

We come each and every week to hear God's word proclaimed in the liturgy and music, the readings and preaching.

We come to receive God's sacraments and to be touched by God's presence.

We come with hearts and minds, with hands and mouths and bodies, to receive the incarnate God, the God who took – and still takes – physical form for us, in so many different ways and so many unexpected people and places.

We come and bring our ordinary skills and extraordinary hopes and fears. We come to receive God's promise to use all that we have and are and for God's glory.

And we come in order that we can go. Go from our place of worship in order to make a difference in our hurting world.

So may it be. Amen.