



Sermon preached by Revd Nigel Uden on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2025

Readings: *Genesis 2.4b-9; Psalm 139; John 6.35-40*

Trinity I

*Source of life*

Text Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life.' John 6.35

Two things this morning could make us think of the 'source' of life: the font, and bread.

The word 'font' may well be derived from the Latin *fontis*, meaning 'fountain', and therefore 'source'. Coming for baptism at the font is a way of coming to – a way of celebrating – the source of life.

The Genesis Bible passage depicted God as the source, the giver of this life and of everything that sustains it. Of course, Genesis chapter 2 gives us the second of the Bible's accounts of creation. The first version in Genesis 1 describes a *remote* God, who oversees creation by speaking it into being - a bit like those managers who direct everything from their office but never cross the threshold of anyone else's. God said, 'Let there be light'; God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures'; God said, 'let us make humankind in our image'.<sup>1</sup> And because God said it, so it happened. The second version, which we heard, tells us about an *engaged* God, who we found getting the divine hands dirty in taking part in the complexity of creation: 'God *formed* man from the dust of the ground and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. And the Lord God *planted* a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he *put* the man whom he had *formed*.' And later, believing it not good that the man should be alone: 'the Lord God .... *took* one of [the man's] ribs ... *made* it into a woman and *brought her* to the man.'<sup>2</sup> As Robert Alter has it: 'God ... *does not summon things into being from a lofty distance through the mere agency of divine speech, but works as a craftsman, fashioning, blowing life breath into nostrils, building a woman from a rib.*'<sup>3</sup>

So, we are invited to entertain the lavish idea that the source of all life, starting with human beings, is God – that God dirties God's hands in making everything that is and then God bears in their own body on the tree,<sup>4</sup> the cost of loving everything that God has made.

We sang about this more intimately in Psalm 139: *For you created me and shaped me, gave me life within my mother's womb.*<sup>5</sup>

That's true for Mabel Clementine – she is 'fearfully and wonderfully made'<sup>6</sup>, 'a wonder, a miracle',<sup>7</sup> but probably you don't need me to tell you that. It's true for you and me, and for others we cherish. Every one of us is a wonder and a miracle. Of course, it's also true for those we *don't* cherish. We might struggle to love them, maybe to like them, but they are loved by God, even the ones we fell out with at work on Friday and wish we didn't have to encounter against work tomorrow. All are as fearfully and wonderfully made by God as is Mabel, whom we find it so *easy* to love this morning.

Coming to the font reminds us of who is the source of *our* life, as much as of Mabel's, and thus to be grateful for each day as a gift, to be relished and exploited, all the time willing to see others as God's handiwork, another of God's works of art.<sup>8</sup>

Our other Bible reading, though, also speaks of a source of life. This one is *bread* – for twelve thousand years, a basic food, source of nutrition and energy, providing carbohydrates, fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals. Perhaps remembering the manna that for forty years had nourished the Israelites in the

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1.3, 24

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2.7-8, 21-22

<sup>3</sup> Alter, Robert 1996 *Genesis: translation and commentary* New York: W.W. Norton page 7

<sup>4</sup> I Peter 2.24

<sup>5</sup> From the hymn, *O God, you search me*, by Bernadette Farrell (1957-) CH4 97.5.1f

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 139.14

<sup>7</sup> Grosch-Miller, Carla 2014 *Psalms Redux: poems and prayers* Norwich: Canterbury Press pages 84f

<sup>8</sup> cf Ephesians 2.10 (NEB)

wilderness,<sup>9</sup> Jesus reuses this idea of a life-giving source to describe himself. He says: 'I am the bread of life.'<sup>10</sup>

Jesus's ever so ordinary words often had more than one layer. 'I am the bread of life' meant that he feeds us for more than simply this physical life, with all its ups and downs. He feeds us for the inner life of thinking, of philosophising, and maybe of believing.

When Jesus came, he was described as being full of grace and truth: full of truths that define God, like that tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and full of the grace that embodies God. You can tell it's time someone retired, when they slip in their favourite witticisms for one last time. So here goes: 'The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us ... full of G + T'.<sup>11</sup> When Jesus is full of G+T, of grace and truth, it means he is showing us God.

That is, God who is as God is in Jesus: *Wisdom* that is counter cultural – love your enemies,<sup>12</sup> because not to do so will leave them as your enemies; *Judgement* that does not look happily on sin and requires us to turn away from it; and *Mercy* that judges that sinfulness with an undeserved forgiveness that enables us to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and start again. Jesus is full of that grace which is sufficient for all our needs<sup>13</sup> in this life, and for whatever comes after this life. We don't know what that is going to be like, but our faith offers this tantalising idea that as God made us in love and sustains us in love, so God will redeem us by that same love for this life and for all that lies beyond it.

That is the second dimension of life that we celebrate at Baptism: we come to the font as the source of that life 'in all its fulness'.<sup>14</sup>

And just as the bread we know as our staple food is only of any use if we eat it, and do so repeatedly, so in this other sense, Jesus is only effectively the bread of eternal life if we treat him with that seriousness which 'consumes' him as regularly as we consume bread – or whatever our staple food is. Jesus is the bread of *eternal* life as and when we turn to him consistently, all life long – continually exploring the truth that he is, and drawing upon the grace with which he treats us. Baptism, whether we come to the font as an infant or to the baptistry as a believer, is coming to the source, and sticking with the source.

As with George and Albie's, and yours and mine, Mabel's baptism is a celebration of her birth and of the blessing she is to Ella and Glenn, to her brothers, and to us all, gift from the life-giving source. It is also a celebration of the eternal life God offers us through the grace and truth we receive as the bread of life from the bread of Jesus.

And, you know, mystery though all this religious stuff is, my own sense, indeed, my own experience, is that I'd rather live with the questions, forever exploring them, being tantalised when I can't get beyond the question but leaving the door to understanding open – rather than shut that door, dogmatically claiming that there is no God, restricting the chance of God's love getting through to me; a love which respects my ambivalence, even as he form me for faith, thereby feeding me for eternal life.

Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life.' Let us eat in faith and in thanksgiving.

N. P. Uden

22<sup>nd</sup> June 2025

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<sup>9</sup> Exodus 16

<sup>10</sup> John 6.35

<sup>11</sup> cf John 1.14

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 5.43f

<sup>13</sup> II Corinthians 12.9

<sup>14</sup> John 10.10