

August 2, 2015



“The God We Can Know: I Am the Bread of Life”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

John 6: 30-35

So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’

This is the second in our Summer Sermon Series called “The God We Can Know” through Jesus Christ who reveals God to us as the Door, the Vine, the Light of the World, and today, the Bread of Life. In using these expressions, Jesus takes something very familiar and uses it to reveal to us something essential about God.

(Let me just say parenthetically, in case you don’t know—in case you want to read Part 1 in the series, past sermons are available in printed form out in the rack in the narthex, and on-line on the church website in both printed and audio form. So if you ever miss one and want catch up, there are a variety of ways for you to do that.)

So last week, we talked about God whose name is “I Am who I Am” and we began to see how Jesus takes on that I Am name for himself and then opens it to us in objects taken right from everyday life. I am the Bread of Life, we hear him say today. That works on the most literal level and also on spiritual levels as well.

Jesus said: I am the Bread of Life. Bread, of course, was at the center of the Mediterranean diet for rich and poor alike. The bread of the poor was most often made with barley; the bread of the rich made with the finest wheat. It was eaten at every meal. It was the most important food in the biblical period and for centuries to follow. No wonder, then that it is included in the central religious rituals of both Judaism and Christianity. Bread.

It’s all through the Biblical story. Remember the mysterious manna God provided the Israelites in the wilderness when their own supplies of bread had run out? Over and over again, food and bread are signs of God’s bountiful generosity to the people of his creation. No wonder, then, that when God sends Jesus, he is born in Bethlehem, which means “the house of bread.”

Jesus carries on with this theme throughout all that he says and does. He preached that his followers were to be food for others. He demonstrated God’s bounty by feeding the crowds with two barley loaves, the bread of the poor, and five fish, a story so beautifully portrayed in John August Swanson’s serigraph in our Chapel narthex. And he tells us, in the Sermon on the Mount, to give food to anyone who asks.

This is the real reason why we are encouraged to bring food every time we come to worship. This month’s suggested food is pinto beans and other beans--non-perishable food needed by the Westside Food Bank to respond to greatly increased demands on their cupboards. Did you see the recent article in the front page of the Santa Monica Daily Press last week about food insecurity increasing here in Santa Monica and the Westside—among the homeless, sure, but also among seniors and families trying to scrape by facing rising costs in rent, utilities, health care, other living expenses? Food insecurity here on the Westside? Really? Makes us stop and think...

Jesus said: I am the Bread of Life. We who know his love are called to give generously to provide food to others. Sign up today after worship for the Aug. 5th Stop Hunger Now event at Westwood UMC. Take a friend, go as a family. The goal is to package 50,000 meals in two hours of work together. Raise your hand if you’ve done it before---talk with these folks. It is awesome.

Jesus said: I am the Bread of Life. And in addition to actual food for stomachs, he meant by that food for hungry hearts. “I am the Bread of Life”, he says. Come to me, and you shall not hunger. Come to me, and you shall not thirst.”

Do we not know spiritual food insecurity as well? Are not our hearts hungry for the food of the living God?
Jesus said: I am the Bread of Life.

Lots of things can cause the heart to be hungry. I'm sure that the physicians among us, even the heart specialists, have seen this sort of heart condition, seen it beyond the reported physical symptoms and complaints. A hungry heart comes from loss of a love, the rupture of a relationship, the loss of a job, depression, the betrayal of a friendship, the diagnosis of a serious illness, a parent's failing health, a child's rebellion, a dream deferred, a world at war—all kinds of things can cause our hearts to feel hungry for something more. We grow hungry for hope, hungry for love. And no matter what the condition of our life at the moment, we are always hungry for God, for the God we can know.

Jesus said: I am the Bread of Life. Christ is the incarnation of God's gift of bread. He feeds our souls as well as our bodies. He "satisfies the hungry heart," as our hymn puts it, with life that goes beyond the grain of the wheat to the deepest longings of our hearts. And he gives us this sacrament so that we might know and remember him in the breaking and sharing of bread.

We come to the table this morning with great longing and expectation. We come with deep hungers in our hearts for meaning and purpose and clarity and peace. We ALL come with hungry hearts, knowing our need of grace.

One of the names for this sacrament of Holy Communion is "eucharist," which means "thanksgiving" in Greek. We come saying "Thank you" for the gift of the Bread of Life.

We come knowing that we are not perfect, yet God has great things in store for us. We can but say "thank you." We come to a table where there is room enough for all, where there is a place for each and every one of us. And we say "thank you."

We come to partake of this sacrament in the confidence that faith can make us whole and strong, that bodies and hearts be strengthened for service. We come knowing that we will be fed, body and soul, and thus transformed to take part in the transformation of the world.

Mother Teresa said: "In each of our lives Jesus comes as the bread of life—to be eaten, to be consumed by us. This is how he loves us. Then Jesus comes into our human life as the hungry one, the other, hoping to be fed with the bread of our life--our hearts loving, our hands serving."

Jesus said: I am the Bread of Life. Fed by this bread, we can leave this time of worship healthier, stronger, clearer, more confident and more generous than when we came.

Feed us now, O God, and use us to work your will in this world. Feed us with your life, fire us with your love, confront us with your justice, and make us one in the body of Christ. Amen.

Thanks be to God.

Notes

Based on Rob Fuquay [The God We Can Know: Exploring the "I Am" Sayings of Jesus.](#) Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2014.

Jeff Goodman 'Hidden hunger' on the rise. [Santa Monica Daily Press](#), July 24, 2015.