

The Bread of Life
Grace Episcopal Church
Proper 13
10th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Brian C Justice

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Exodus 16.2-4, 9-15
Psalm 78.23-29
Ephesians 4.1-16
John 6.24-35

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“God commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven;
God rained down on them manna to eat ...”

Amen.

(Psalm 78.23-24)

What do we want in our lives?

What do we need in our lives?

Our wants and our needs ... Are they the same? Are they different?

In today's readings, we are offered deep insight into what we *really* want and what we *really* need.

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In Exodus, the “whole congregation of the Israelites” is in the wilderness and “complain against Moses and Aaron.”

They are hungry.

They even exclaim, “if only we had died in Egypt!”

But God, who is steadfast love, provides for them and rains down “bread from heaven.”

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In John, Jesus continues his ministry among a large crowd around the Sea of Galilee.

As we heard in last Sunday's text, the crowd witnesses what John calls "a sign" – the feeding of the "five thousand" with bread and fish. This miracle inspires the crowd "to take Jesus by force and make him king." But he withdraws to the mountains for a time and then he and his disciples cross the sea.

There, the crowd finds Jesus and asks him three questions and makes one demand.

First, they ask, "Rabbi when did you come here?" Jesus responds, not with an answer to the question itself, but with an assertion and an instruction, "you are looking for me ... because you ate your fill ... do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures..."

Second, they ask, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus says, "This is the work of God, to believe in him whom God has sent."

Third, they ask, "What sign are you going to give us ... that we see it and believe?" And they recall the experience of their ancestors with Moses who received bread in the wilderness. Jesus says, "It is God (not Moses) 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." Then they demand, "give us this bread." Jesus says, "*I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry...*"

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As creatures, we need food...drink...sleep...shelter...to survive. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, like the crowd at the Sea of Galilee, like everyone ... we hunger and we want bread for our bodies.

But we need more. And, in truth, we *want* more. We need and we want that which will fortify our bodies, but we need and we want that which will feed our souls.

But, in the struggle to survive – to get by day after day, to get through the night – we might forget that deeper spiritual need. Maybe we don't notice it or maybe we neglect it. Or, maybe we just don't know *how* or *where* to nourish our hearts, our minds, our spirits. Maybe in our materialistic society, *we* are the Israelites in the wilderness and the crowds in front of Jesus who demand only material bread for material reasons... "give us bread!"

Jesus does not answer the people's questions as they – or, we! – might expect, but he is doing what he always does: trying to help us *break through* to a new understanding.

What we really want is deeper than what we might think.
What we really want *is* our deepest need.

And on the shores of the Galilee, Jesus reveals the shocking truth:
We can have what we really want and what we really need.
In truth, we *already have it* ... God has already given it to us!

It is the Bread of Life.
Jesus *is* what the Bread of Life is.

It is what he is ... It is God ... who is Love.

It's love. *It's love.*

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Our theology in the Episcopal Church is a Sacramental theology.

A Sacrament is a visible sign of the invisible presence and love of God.
Jesus Christ who is the Incarnation of God *is* the archetypal Sacrament.

Sacramental theology exposes profound meaning for us:

Not only has God created the material world and the human body and declared them “good” (in Genesis), God takes on material form in a human body in Jesus, and through incarnation, transfigures the body, transfigures matter itself into something holy, something sacred, something capable of mediating the divine presence.

The earth is touched by heaven. The physical is touched by the spiritual. The temporal is touched by the eternal.

For the Church and for us this is absolutely critical. The material stuff of the Church and of our lives – water, fire, bread, wine, glass, paper, ink, wood, paint, metal, soil, the human voice and hands and eyes – is the very stuff through which we encounter and know God.

And ultimately we know this ...

If God is Love (1 John 4.16) and Jesus – who is the Bread of Life – is God, then the Bread of Life is Love.

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St Paul deeply participated in the sacramental Christ-experience.

In today's text, the author of the Letter to the Ephesians witnesses to it and

invites us to it:

“Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”

“Bear with one another in love.”

“There is one body and one Spirit ...one God ...who is above all and through all and in all.” (!!!)

And so we “must grow up in every way into ... Christ ...building up in love.”

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This is a call to us to live into the sacramental Christ-experience that is ours ...

to seek and find Christ who is the Bread of Life in everyone and in everything ...

to live fully and love fiercely in this God-given, God-transfigured sacramental world ...

to take and bless and break and give ourselves and one another the bread that fortifies our bodies and feeds our souls...

to see and smell and hear and touch and taste the things of our lives as sacred things, as sacraments ...

to taste the goodness of God and God’s creation ...

and to do what is *already* ours to do ... break bread day by day ...

but break in it love and, in love, welcome everyone – *everyone* – to break it with us ...

to be there ... to be present ... to be *in love* ...

it’s what we really want *and* what we really need ...

and it’s ours ... it’s already ours ...

Amen.