

Proper 14b 2021  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
August 8, 2021

2 Samuel 18:5-9,15,31-33   Psalm 130   Ephesians 4:25-5:2   John 6:35,41-51

There was the feeding of the five thousand, the connection to manna given to the Israelites, and Jesus telling the crowd “I am the bread of life.” What is it with this emphasis on bread?

We might notice that the Israelites did not earn the manna that fed them every day. The people were nomads, travelers in strange lands, not tilling the soil, harvesting crops, and working the land. Manna came as a gift from God on their journey to the future that God promised their ancestor Abraham. Forty years in the desert meant that many who started the journey did not complete it, not even Moses, who saw the land but did not enter it. He passed the promise on to God’s family, humankind. Daily sustenance is a gift from God.

The crowds who ate their fill from a young man’s lunch basket did not earn that meal, either. It was a generous gift from Jesus, God incarnate, to those hungry – that day for food – and further, hungry in a deep longing for the spiritual food that comes only from God. There was so much bread that two loaves provided food for everyone, with twelve baskets left over. Jesus’ disciples gathered up the crumbs so that nothing was lost.

Have you ever been “gathered up” by Jesus or a follower of Jesus? How about the soup that someone brings you, the phone calls you make to keep in touch, the texts and notes and prayers sent and received? A neighbor walked my dog when I had pneumonia. I went with a friend, as she did for me, for medical procedures. We gather one another up in so many ways; this is God through Jesus now, making sure that no one is lost. Our “not being lost” includes our own prayer time with God; “help” is a sufficient prayer, as is quiet time spent listening for God’s presence. Such offerings are manna, bread, for one another.

Jesus says specifically, “I am the bread of life.” Come to me and you will have everlasting life. Eternal life does not begin with our death; it begins right now. We can have life in Christ, with Christ, right now; it is a present reality and a future promise. We do not earn that life – it is a ridiculously generous gift from God. God loves us, loves you, so much that God does not care only about our birth and our death, but the whole of our lives, so God gave of God’s self to send us God-in-the-flesh, Jesus. The reality of that love is so strong, so powerful, so life-altering and full of life that we are supposed to taste, touch, and ingest that love, that life. Take, eat. Now in us, we are freed to give love as Jesus does – lavishing, without fear, in a way that exemplifies how we walk with Christ, in a way that lets others know that we taste the presence of God. The bread of life comes from God, and we do not have to earn it. Take, eat. This is my body given for you. We can now – and again and again, pour that love into the world because God is our sustenance, our only bread, made eternal in God’s son. Jesus knows betrayal, grief, deep suffering, the feeling of being abandoned, and the ultimate joy of being lifted into God’s arms.

Remember the statue named the Pieta? Pieta means pity, and the Pieta is Michelangelo’s depiction of Mary holding her son’s body after it had been taken down from the cross. That caring? That love? That deep embrace? That is how God cares for each of us. When you are hurting, God holds you. When you rejoice, God is in those feelings and actions of joy. There is

also a shocking tension in this depiction of God's son. Mary, the mother who birthed Jesus, now holds the body of God in her arms ....

In the brutal reality of humanity, in which a king's son is slaughtered,  
The real king, the bread of life, is held in his mother's embrace.

A king, King David, is human, and weeps over his son. The king of glory, Jesus, is the king and the son; God and his mother weep over our brutality. But our humanity is held in the arms of God. God's son gives us life so filling that we can live on that Word alone.

We can see Jesus in the face of another because we have taken Jesus into ourselves.

Take, eat. This is my body ... the bread of the world.

We, created in the image of God, are filled and free. Filled with the love that comes from the cross, and down from that cross, setting us free to love one another.

That love is so strong that it raises us from the dead, our physical death, and in whatever is dead inside of us. Here is our task: to unearth those parts of ourselves that feel dead, or feel like death. Gather them up, feed them with the love of God, fill them with the bread of life ... and see how death is conquered over and over again. Those gathered fragments of bread will feed the world, a gift of life, from God. We hunger after power, toys, money, status, achievement, and things that will never fill us. Jesus explodes the myth of power by showing us what true power is – a sacrificial love in which we would give up our lives for another. Jesus shows us courage in giving up his life for us, submitting to God even when he felt abandoned (forsaken) by God.

Grasp onto the freedom in a life that knows sacrificial love, that knows power in service to others, that knows the overspilling love from being exactly who we are right now, beloved children of God,

Made in God's image,

Loved beyond human measure.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."

Take, eat.

The bread is given by God, for you. (Amen.)