

Proper 13 (10 Pentecost year B) 2021  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
August 1, 2021

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a   Psalm 51:1-12   Ephesians 4:1-16   John 6:24-35

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.

These words are at the beginning of last week's gospel. A crowd continually follows Jesus – at that time, for the healing he was doing. Then, the people needed to eat ... and from a random person in the crowd's standpoint, that Jesus man, perhaps, did some magic. If it was not magic, then ...? Who is Jesus?

Today's passage begins in a similar fashion: the crowd is looking for Jesus, so  
“they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. They found him on the other side of the sea.”

The “other side of the sea” gives us a new context from which to interpret Jesus' miracle of feeding – for it was a miracle and not magic. We move from one context, one side of the sea, to another context, “the other” side of the sea. The crowd comes to Jesus looking for a meal – that bread and those fish were rather good yesterday!

Jesus calls the crowd on their mission:

“Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

In others words, you are back because you are hungry, maybe want some free food, and being physically hungry is not the point at all.

There is a parallel conversation earlier in John's gospel, not about bread, but about water. Jesus meets a woman from Samaria at a well, and Jesus describes himself as living water. Jesus is not just a Jewish man meeting a Samaritan woman – remember that Israelites hate Samaritans – at an inappropriate time and place, but proclaims himself to be living water. The woman wants to know if Jesus is better, “more than” Jacob. The crowd wants to know if Jesus is better, “more than” Moses.

This conversation takes place right after the people, more than 5,000, have been fed with five loaves of barley bread and two fish, and that after everyone has had their fill, there are twelve baskets of crumbs left over. Jesus performed quite a miracle. The people want to know when they will be fed again. They want another miracle, an additional sign, that Jesus will provide God's bread in the same way that Moses provided God's manna.

At the well Jesus says that whoever drinks of the water that Jesus gives them will never be thirsty. The water will be a spring welling up to eternal life. Today Jesus says: “It is my father who gives true bread from heaven.” Then, his second preposterous claim: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Jesus is calling himself manna, the bread from heaven. He is bread that will feed people forever, not only for a time in the wilderness. Jesus is taking on and claiming the actions of God.

Jesus points us to our spiritual hunger, which is what he really wants to fill. We are created to love God and love others as we loved ourselves, and if we try to live without that connection, that relationship, we will feel empty, hungry, even starving. We can think of our hunger in this way: that we all have “God-shaped” holes to fill, and only God can fill them. How do we fill those holes?

Believe, says Jesus. The work of our faith is our belief itself. “I believe,” we say in each Sunday Eucharist. Am I done; that’s it? No. We state our belief, participating in words and then in the action of coming to the altar rail and reaching out for the bread of life, for Jesus. God took Jesus’ whole life, blessed it, broke it and gave it to us. We are to let Jesus’ whole story, from birth, life, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, be part of our faith life. God takes us our life, blesses us; is with us when the world breaks us, and gives us back to the world, spiritually and bodily filled with Christ.

If we eat only one meal a week, we will be very hungry most of the time. Similarly, if we partake of Jesus only once a week, our God-shaped spiritual holes will empty quickly. We need God’s continual prayer. Fortunately, we have resources to feed daily on God’s word. The daily offices in the Book of Common Prayer are meant to be part of our spiritual food. Reading and praying the daily offices provide us with a time of prayer and of immersing ourselves in God’s word through the accompanying bible readings. We spend much of our lives working for the food that perishes – earthly food, water, necessities and extras. Our connection with God through daily prayer is the forever food that fills our spirits. It is when we are full to overflowing with God’s word, with our connection, that we pour God’s love into the world.

Daily prayer is food for our souls! Commit yourself – ourselves – again, or for the first time, to a meal each day of prayer and scripture reading. Open your prayer book. Take one home if you need one. Redeemer has prayer books with some “Sunday pages” missing that are perfect for home use of ongoing prayer. “Pray without ceasing,” Paul writes. Know that we never pray alone: whenever we pray, someone in the universe, of “all the saints” is praying, too, and praising and glorifying God. Join the saints. Be filled with your ongoing connection to God. How else will we have the fuel to face the tests that life gives us? Our early fall Christian Education will include learning how to pray the daily offices – where they are in the prayer book, what readings to use, the full cycles of prayer that the Episcopal church provides us for Sundays and weekdays. Daily prayer IS bible study, so we’ll start there in the fall.

Maybe that sounds like a lot. Twenty minutes a day, my friends, will change your life. Baby steps are good. Say the Lord’s Prayer and sit quietly. Set an alarm for twenty minutes. Work up to the gift to yourself of the rich resource of the Offices. Begin by praying in whatever way you can.

We have challenges ahead of us; every life does – and we have ways to live not just getting by, with barely full bellies, but with so much spiritual food and drink that we begin to feel full with the abundant life that God has given us. Give yourself fuel for life’s journey, and in so doing, become a stronger, more connected body of Christ than we ever imagined we could be. Amen.