

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost, August 2, 2015, Liturgical Year "B"

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 6:24-35

"I AM – the Bread of Life"

One of my very favorite things to do is walk into a room where fresh bread is baking. The aroma carries everywhere! Bread comes in different smells, sizes, shapes and forms. Bread has been a dietary staple of people for ages. Did you know that God even gives a recipe for bread in Ezekiel 4:9-17? The Lord describes taking "*wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt*" as a combination for bread. I tried to find out how many kinds of bread there are - and the answer is "too many to list!" If you start with white, wheat, wholegrain, spelt, sourdough, oat, barley, rye, kamut, triticale, millet, and even rice, then there are additions to the breads like basil, garlic, onion, cinnamon, and fruit like raisins, berries and nuts, not to mention refined and enriched! See what I mean? I am sure that I am making many of you look forward to "lunch" right?

When we hear about bread in the Gospels, I don't know about you, but I think of leavened and unleavened, and then my memory takes me to the miracles for the feeding of the many thousands – there is the feeding of the four thousand, and the five thousand – and that is just the men – not to mention their families! And then takes me to Jesus' breaking of the bread at the Last Supper. I even remember during our first trip, our family trip to Israel back in 1999, during which we brought our 10 year old son and 6 year old daughter, entitled "*Let the Children Come*," led by our Rector and friend, who now is our Bishop, Neil Lebhar, his wife Marcia, along with their son, Peter. Out in the Negev desert we were reclining in a Bedouin tent, lying back on countless cushions, where they bring in trays of food. Prior to our food we were watching a man take a thick dough, and pound it, flatten it, and then spread it out on what looked like an "upside down wok" over an open fire of coals. The finished product was more like a pancake or tortilla, yet much closer to the bread of Jesus' day than many of the types of bread that I listed a moment ago.

Today, we are used to bread being just "a part" of the meal, almost a side dish. It is very interesting that bread was really the chief food of Israel, made with barley flour mixed with broad beans, lentils, and other grains - like I listed before from Ezekiel. This was the main staple and everything else was the side dish. The Hebrew word "lechem" means bread, and has an Arabic equivalent meaning "meat." The Hebrew word "Bet" or "Beth" means "house of" - for example Bethsaida means "house of fishing." If you put that together then Bethlehem or Bet - Lechem means "house of bread." I find it amazing that the Creator of the Universe sees to it that the little town in which "the Bread of Life" - Jesus is named "the house of bread!" This is no coincidence by any means! God has a plan for our lives – even those who don't believe. The lechem was baked on a griddle, or in clay ovens, and made into flat loaves about 1/2 an inch thick. They can be as large as 20 inches round. Usually a hole was left in the middle to make it easier to pull apart for eating. Bread was NEVER cut, always torn. At a Seder meal or

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Shabbat dinner, you would have Challah bread. It is amazing and delicious. It is never cut – people would just tear off a piece. Other foods like meat or fish were wrapped in bread and eaten. It was without a doubt a very major part of every meal. The bread could be dipped into olive oil or a humus mixture. Do you remember that at the Last Supper Jesus said that *"It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish."* Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon." (John 13:26)

Today's Gospel begins right after some very important events take place - about the compassion and love of Jesus - and how it is demonstrated through His signs or miracles. We find Jesus and the apostles in John chapter 6 - Right after the feeding of the five thousand men and their families, from 5 small barley loaves, and two fish - small loaves.

- The disciples had gotten into the only boat on the shore, and left.
- Jesus remained behind, praying on the mountain, until He saw the disciples rowing nowhere in the middle of the night, so He across the lake to join them. After He calmed the storm - instantly they got to where they were going!
- A little later, some of the remaining people didn't see Jesus or the Disciples, so they got into boats that came in from Tiberius, and returned to Capernaum. When they got there, they asked Jesus *"Rabbi, when did you come here?"*

I think a better question for them to ask could have been - **Rabbi, HOW did you get here?** There were no other boats than the one the disciples took.

Jesus was ready for them, and didn't answer their question, but instead He insists that the only reason they are looking for Him is to get some more of the bread that they filled up on. The Galileans of Jesus' time had to work for their bread, so when they found a miraculous source of food -- this was Great News! I'll bet they thought they had found the mother lode thinking that Jesus, (if He really was the Messiah,) was going to provide them with a gravy train of Manna, just like Moses did. I am sure that those that were present at the feeding of the 5,000 men and their families remembered Jesus blessing the bread, looking to heaven, and were reminded of the words of Psalm 78:23-25 *"Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the rain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat."* They were hoping this was their golden opportunity.

Ken read for us this morning from the Book of Exodus how God promised Moses that the people who were griping and wanting to return to Egypt to have all of the wonderful food that they had there. They wanted to be eating leeks and onions by the Nile. They were forgetting that God took them away from slavery. And so they were griping and complaining and whining,

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and so God said I will give them meat to eat – every night quail (a delicacy) will fall for them to eat and have their fill. God was giving them something they couldn't even imagine, and yet it was everywhere! Every morning when the dew dried – there was manna, like coriander seed, and would collect that, enough for the day.

Jesus wanted to set the record straight - first of all, everybody was getting excited about the food, while many of them missed the miracle of the loaves and fishes - the others didn't realize the significance. They also missed the walking on the water. They missed the calming of the winds and the sea, and they missed the miracle of time and space "*as they got there immediately!*" As soon as Jesus got in the boat – they instantly got where they were going!

Jesus did not come to fill people's stomachs; He came to fill their lives with the very essence of Almighty God. The crowd was focusing on the physical, instead of the spiritual aspect of what they were experiencing and witnessing. Isn't it true that often we can be like the crowd, busy focusing on stuff, rather than having the eyes and ears to hear God's presence in our lives? Jesus challenges the people, telling them not to work for food that perishes, but for food that endures forever - for eternal life - which only the Son of Man can give to you. Jesus says that this food can be obtained one way - by believing in him, **but He reminds them that it is a gift at the same time.** The Son of Man freely gives of His own life, and by doing so, makes it possible for us to share in that life.

Apparently the Galileans were so caught up in the material stuff and filling their stomachs that they couldn't see Jesus' point, so they ask Him what God wants them to do. Jesus couldn't make it any more plain --- **they need to BELIEVE in Him** - the one whom the Father has sent - **that is the work that God requires.** People to this very day have problems with that. In John 14:6, we discussed this during our Wednesday night Bible Study, Jesus says that "*I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through Me!*" People still have a problem with that saying "oh, there has got to be more than one way to the Father." Let me share with you something from our discussion on Wednesday Night: If you say that Jesus is not the WAY – then you are dethroning Him, and if you dethrone Jesus, then you are enthroning someone or something else! I don't even want to think about that one!

How often did Jesus say that we need ears to hear and eyes to see? Here we have "eye witnesses" to miracle after miracle, but they didn't see it. They're still not getting it, so they ask Jesus for a sign to help them believe.

- I cannot help but wonder what part of feeding over 5,000 people (men and their families) with 5 loaves and 2 fish didn't they get?
- And then the Apostles leave in the only boat, Jesus stays behind - more boats come later

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- Jesus isn't around, they leave - they arrive in Capernaum - **Jesus is** already there.
Signs?

- These people are looking for signs? (and people are still looking for signs today!)

From the original Greek, the word used is σημεῖον (semayon) which means sign or miracle, and to John, the author of today's Gospel, signs and miracles are one and the same thing - they are interchangeable.

It is pretty evident that these people have short memories! In their defense, however, I need to ask: how often do we forget what God has done for us, taking His good gifts for granted, because they come to us sometimes in ordinary ways, with no flashes and spectacular or special effects? How often do we forget to take stock in the blessings that He has given to us? I would say that the Galileans are not alone in having short memories. One thing they haven't forgotten about is food. So they bring up the Manna in the desert issue - quoting to Jesus that their ancestors had bread from heaven to eat, and they were asking Jesus to do something even greater than Moses did, to prove that He was greater than Moses – the Messiah. Not only had Moses brought their ancestors the Manna, but he also freed them from the horrible rule of the Egyptians. Now they saw someone who could fill their stomachs and who could also be the Messiah; and maybe He would free them of the oppressive rule of the Romans. Jesus reminds them what the truth is;

- First of all - It wasn't Moses who sent the manna, but it was God the Father.
- The manna of the desert that the Israelites fed upon had to be collected every morning, before the sun melted it. If stockpiled for any other day than the Sabbath, it bred worms and spoiled.
- Manna was food for the body, and was a gift of God's provision for those 40 years in the wilderness. Every day, except for the Sabbath, manna rained down from heaven – for 40 years!
- Jesus Himself is God's full provision for people for their whole existence.

Jesus repeatedly tells us that He had come down from heaven. If we believe in Jesus, as the Son of the Living God, we are drawn out of the wilderness of darkness and sin, and fed with the food of eternal life. Jesus is the light if the word! Do you know what light does to darkness? It exposes it; it removes it! When we turn on the lights in the church all of the darkness goes away. When you walk into a dark room and you hit the light switch on the wall, suddenly you can see everything. That is what Jesus does for us!

Just like the Samaritan Woman at the well in John 4, "*asking for more*" when Jesus offered her the living water of eternal life, the crowd says "*give us this bread - always.*" In answer to

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this request, Jesus drives His point home by saying: "*I am the bread of life.*" In Mark 6, Jesus calmed the apostles as He walked across the water by telling them, "*It is I.*" There is a direct connection as if to say "*I AM is here.*" The text in the original New Testament Greek, and the translation of the words "*ego eimi*" "ἐγώ εἰμι," for "*I AM*" jumped out at me. The same words, "*ego eimi*" "ἐγώ εἰμι" in the Ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament - the same words were used by God in Exodus 3:14, proclaiming his holy name to Moses -- "*I am*" "*ego eimi*" "ἐγώ εἰμι."

This is the first of seven times that Jesus used these very same words describing His true identity as God Himself. He has told us, "*I am the Good Shepherd,*" "*I am the true Vine,*" "*I am the gate,*" "*I am the way, the truth and the life,*" "*I am the resurrection and the life,*" "*I am the light of the world*" - and by proclaiming "*I am the bread of life, Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty*" Jesus reveals to us that He alone is the key to the world's spiritual birth and spiritual survival.

Believing in Jesus, reading His Holy Word, having a personal relationship with Him, and as we are about to do in just a few moments, exercising the privilege of receiving His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, we are partakers of that heavenly bread - "*the Bread of Life*". Just as bread must be eaten to sustain physical life, we need to invite Jesus Christ into our lives to give us spiritual life and to sustain it. We need to receive spiritual life when we come to Jesus Christ. We need to invite Him in. I want you to open your Pew Bibles to page 1917 to Revelation chapter 3 verse 20. Jesus is standing at a door and He says "*Here I Am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me.*" Jesus is ever the "perfect gentleman." He will never force Himself on us or make us love Him. That is the whole story of the Bible. God is continually rejected, time after time by the people of Israel, by other people. He wants you to love Him on your own accord, not because of pressure; not because of fear. That is not who Jesus is. The decision belongs to each one of us. Do you want to share eternal life with Jesus, or not? Please think about your relationship with Jesus, and pray about your decision. He stands and waits.