

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA
The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: August 8, 2021

“Bread of Life”

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Good morning, Everyone. In today’s Gospel we have another “bread of life” reading. I want to begin with stating we are not talking about actual bread, and we are not talking about the Eucharist.

During our Bible study last week, I was reminded that if we actually take the miraculous out of the way, (meaning that if we look deeper into the reality of Jesus) we may realize that the feeding of the five thousand did not only depend on Jesus and some miraculous event, but may, indeed, have been participatory with everyone sitting around Jesus sharing with each other what little they already had. Thus multiplying their meal to the point of overflowing leftovers.

Multiplying each individual’s contribution by their gift of sharing, their giving of the “bread” of life, in the case of the feeding of five thousand may actually have been physical bread and fish. But as we continue on and hear Jesus talk, we have to realize that Jesus is talking far beyond manna from heaven, or actual bread, but instead about the feeding of the soul. Which, in the form of the previous readings, leave us to understand that we are all participants in the same meal. The meal of life itself.

Have you been fed by the life of another? What if that’s what Jesus is talking about when he speaks of himself as the bread of life? Throughout the gospels we see him feeding and nourishing life in so many ways and circumstances. Ways that are not always through actual food. We see him nourishing those on the margins through his love, presence, guidance, and teachings; through his healing, forgiveness, and

mercy; through his generosity, compassion, and wisdom. This is the bread that feeds the soul, and this is the nourishment that prepares us and stays with us beyond this lifetime.

Those qualities of feeding and nourishing others is not unique to Jesus. They can be ours as well. There are so many ways that God shares God's life with us. We both eat that bread of life, real physical nourishment, and we can also fill ourselves with faith, hope and love; and we too can become living bread.

We can also partake of the bread of someone else's life and our life can be nourished; our life can be sustained; and our life strengthened. Who has nourished you lately? Who has fed you by saying just the right words to help you continue on?

Recall someone who offered you wisdom or guidance, who listened to your life, or spoke a word of hope or encouragement that nourished and sustained your life. They were bread for you. Or maybe there was someone who helped you discover meaning or purpose in your life. Perhaps it was someone who said, "I forgive you" and you were strengthened to move forward. Maybe someone believed in you when you weren't so sure about yourself. Our lives are nourished and fed by others in thousands of ways. In fact, this week we also celebrate Florence Nightingale, another who fed us with the gift of patience, compassion and healing.

We have to be both receiver and giver. When have you been bread in someone else's life? When have you fed and nourished them? When have you sustained them? When have you strengthened them?

We so often hear Jesus say, "I am the bread of life," and we assume he is the only loaf in the basket. But what if that is not what he is saying? What if he is not claiming to be the exclusive loaf of bread in this world? What if he is teaching us

what the bread of life looks like so we can find it in this world, so we can become that bread, so we can be that bread for one another?

Have you ever been given a starter batch of sourdough? It holds the potential to become bread, to feed and nourish. What if Jesus is the starter batch in us? What if rather than making an exclusive claim about himself, Jesus is giving us the recipe to become as he is, to become the bread of life for the world? Maybe that's just how God works in the world. Through the receiving of Jesus and his mercy, forgiveness and compassion; he is the starter, just as leavening helps dough rise, and become bread.

The problem that the religious leaders and authorities have in today's gospel is that they want to hold onto their power. They don't want to empower those with Jesus with the idea that they too are blessed by God, and that they too can be filled and be fulfilling. The issue is not that they don't believe that God provides or that God feeds. The issue is that they know Jesus and his mom and dad. They know where he is from. He is the kid from Nazareth; he could not be bread from heaven. But maybe the link of family is part of the ingredients that go into our ability to feed others. Maybe it is our human connections that flavor our offerings to others.

Jesus begins with five loaves of bread and two fish. But maybe that's only to get our attention and to tell us that it is really not about the bread or fish. It is about a way of living; about a way of relating. He said you have got to know the difference between food that perishes and food that endures for eternal life - between bread that is perishable and bread that is imperishable.

The reality is that there is a lot of bread in this world, not all of it life-sustaining. If you look through scriptures you will find references to all sorts of bread: the bread of adversity, the bread of tears, the bread of affliction, the bread of mourning, the bread of wickedness, the bread of idleness, the bread of the stingy, and it goes on

and on. And when you get right down to it, there is really only two kinds of bread; the bread of life that feeds and nourishes and sustains, and all the other bread that leaves us hungry and malnourished.

Let's not forget the old saying, "You are what you eat." If we want life then we need to be eating the bread of life. If we want to bring life to another then we need to be the bread of life.

What kind of bread will you eat this week? What kind of bread will you be for another this week? I know we can all get crusty at times, but I guarantee, we all have that sweet soft center ready to share if we only want to. Amen