

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost : August 1, 2021

“Soul Food”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning, everyone. Jesus clearly states in our Gospel that God and God alone is the mechanism behind our existence. God therefore allows us to choose with our own free will our intentions in life. There will always be something or someone in need, there will always be a situation where education could help, there will always be loss in life because, in this world things were made to be broken.

But in a world that continues to be broken, we have through our love of Jesus and his teachings, a way to learn and participate in ways of healing. It is not what you have in money or in things, it is what God-given gifts you have and how you are using them.

Jesus tells us, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.” I believe this is a call to what we would describe as a work/life balance. It seems so easy to get caught up in the drama of life that we forget to focus on growing our spirituality, taking the time to look inside ourselves and see if our soul is hungry, or if our cup is overflowing in gratitude.

There is the saying that the existentialist will see the glass half empty, the optimist will see the glass half full, and those of faith will see the glass overflowing no matter what the circumstances they are in. This is what Jesus is talking about. Finding the abundance in our life that fills our soul, which is very different from material things or the situations we find ourselves in. It is only connecting with God that can feed and inspire us.

God gives us gifts and also gives us right timing. I mention this as we struggle with the current issues of violence, climate change, and this ever-on-going pandemic. There will be opportunities for action and also opportunities of inaction. There will be voting and fund raising, marching and personal choices around lifestyle, and financial decisions. The question becomes: what will feed my soul, what can I nourish others with?

Today I would like to share a story that truly speaks of today's Gospel. It seems at times God puts an experience in front of me for the reason of a better understanding of the Gospel. I believe this is God's timing as I share the gifts God has given me in pastoral and teaching roles to feed and to be fed.

For some time at my hospice work, a colleague chaplain has been diagnosed with cancer. He is my age and we had done a semester at college together. I feel he is one of the nicest, kindest, walking-the-walk, Christian men I know. Over the last year he has been on a leave of absence and we have not had the opportunity to share as much as either of us would like.

Unfortunately, I recently learned that the treatment he pinned his hopes on did not produce the desired results and although he stated he doesn't feel sick or like he is dying at the moment, he will need to make some choices. This man is a wonderful minister, chaplain, counselor and family man. He comes from a large family and has recently lost his brothers to similar but different cancers. So he understands the gravity of his own situation.

Well, my colleague chose me to be his sounding board this week as he adjusts to his new prognosis. He tells me he is not afraid to die, understanding he will go home to where we

all come from - the kingdom of God. He just needed to know, what was the next thing he needed to do, if indeed he does come to the end of his physical life.

Somewhere along in the conversation we reviewed his gifts from God and how he had used them to the good of humanity. And then I asked him if he thought his soul's journey was complete. I explained I was asking not about what he desired to do in a body, like take a vacation or visit someone, but the journey of his soul.

Without knowing it, I asked him as our Gospel asks us today, what food had he worked for that endures into eternal life. I asked if his soul felt satisfied, fed. And no, I hadn't read our scriptures at this point, but it did seem interesting timing.

From my perspective, I could not even imagine whether I could tell if my colleague's soul's journey was complete. But I knew he would be able to, as we, ourselves are really the only ones who know intimately our own motives throughout our lifetime. Today is a call to look deeply into the motives of the choices we make.

My colleague left our conversation feeling lightened as we ended up with some light-hearted jokes, but he also felt like he needed to do some soul searching. He was going to shift his perspective on how he defines "success" in his life. I know this gentleman and I also know when he checks in with his deeper side, his soul, he will find his cup overflowing, as he has spent a lifetime feeding and filling others.

Our Gospel follows those who want to challenge Jesus, but also those who want to be fed for free. Imagine following Jesus around just for the free leftovers. Jesus was never talking about the actual bread, and the feeding of the five thousand is just a sign of God's

abundance and glory as shown through his Son. Jesus is really talking about the feeding of the soul and it is not free leftovers.

How do we feed our souls? What is the comfort food for our spirits? Jesus tells us he is the bread of life. What exactly is the bread of life Jesus is talking about? Jesus states plainly that to feed the soul is to work in an active faith, not a passive receiving of God's gifts.

Our Epistle explains that we each have God-given gifts to use and we should use them through the intention of love. We also use our gifts by allowing God to choose the timing. In our own circle of people, our own communities, our workplace, our family meetings, our respite hours, we need to ask "are we living the way that Jesus has shown us to love and care for others and ourselves?" Are we feeding souls? Loving neighbors as ourselves; honoring our physical body; caring for God's creation; taking time to pray, worship and appreciate where you are right now; knowing God is in it all.

The question I ask you today is: how well is it with your soul? Take a moment to consider how you receive and appreciate God's gifts and how you take your overflowing love from God and share it. It should not take a dire prognosis to start this reflective process. It is not your earthly title, your job, or your material well-being that defines the health of your soul. But rather an active faith. As we read today I leave you with our Epistle:

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Amen.