

The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
August 11, 2024  
1 Kings 19:4-8, Psalm 34:1-8, Ephesians 4:25-5:2,  
John 6:35, 41-51

## Feeding on the Bread of Life

We've all heard the expression, "You are what you eat!" Those of us who have ever attempted to stick to a diet in the midst of the mouthwatering temptations of pizza, fries, chocolate sundaes with whipped cream and nuts, doughnuts, and cookies, can hear it like a mantra in our minds, and see the doctor or nutritionist shaking their fingers at us over our dietary choices. "You are what you eat!" and in my case, anyway, it is not good at all!

Well, our psychological and spiritual lives need to be fed, too. How are we being nourished? Because there is a lot out there that is not bread. Do we endlessly feed on the myths of the perfect body, the perfect partner, the perfect home or car, or job that we believe will make us feel powerful and confident? Do we feed on competing with our colleagues to get so far ahead that we won't ever have to worry about security for our families again? Do we find nourishment in creating the perfect, insulated life for ourselves and our loved ones, a bulwark against the

scary world around us, filled with strangers who are so different from us? Now it is fine to have financial security, and we need certain material things to live, and it is right and good to care for our families. But do we seek these things as an end in themselves? There is much out there that is not bread.

Or do we seek first the kingdom of God, having faith that the things that we need will be added unto us? Are we nourished by the story of our faith, the teachings of Jesus, the wisdom and grace he provides? Do we feed on our relationship with God through Christ, who takes on our flesh and walks with us even unto death? We have a choice.

What can we learn from this week's Scripture passages about the nourishment of the bread of life? In our lesson from 1 Kings in the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Elijah has killed the prophets of the false idol Baal in the Wadi Kishon, and now he is running for his life. He is exhausted, and frightened, and totally spent, and he lies down under a broom tree and begs God for death to take him. He finally falls asleep, and when he wakes, he finds a jar of water, and a cake baked on hot

stones to provide him nourishment. This nourishment enabled him to travel for 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mount of God, otherwise known as Mt Sinai, where he is to await further instruction from the Lord. Where Elijah saw only fear and famine and death, God brought life, and nourishment that would sustain him. And God will provide us with the food that we need, for our bodies as well as our souls.

In the New Testament lesson from the letter to the Ephesians, the author describes a way of living that feeds the spirit, of not letting anger overwhelm us, of working hard for the common good. We are admonished to speak words that build others up, rather than tearing them down, and to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. This way of life feeds everyone with the spirit of peace, gentleness, and hope. Here, the bread of life is the graciousness that God grants us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And then we come to the Gospel of John. As I had mentioned before, John was the last of the four gospels to be set down in written form. It contains much content that is quite different from the other 3 accounts. Notably, there is not an account of the institution of the Lord's

supper on the night before Jesus died. Instead, we have the story of Jesus sharing that he is the bread of life, and that if we eat of this bread, we will have life forever. It is thought that this story reflects the experience of John's community as they lived together, reflected on the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and began to share the Eucharist together in community. The ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. The one who eats the bread that Jesus gives him will live forever. Also, notice the "I am" sentence here. John is full of such sentences from Jesus: I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection, I am the vine, I am the light of the world, I am the bread of life. The author of John claimed that Jesus, the Word made Flesh, was God from the beginning. The religious authorities of the time grumbled and complained. How can this man give us his flesh to eat? And how can he claim to have come down from heaven? This is Jesus; we know his mother, his father, his sisters, and brothers. And they did not believe in his words, or that he came from the Father.

So, how do these words, passed on through the ages in language that might sound foreign to us, apply to us today? What does it mean to

feed on the Bread of Life? Well, it means that we can feed on the teaching and wisdom and love of Jesus, his way of compassion and justice and grace in the world. But I think it is more than that. I think, in a mysterious, yet wonderful way, we feed on the presence of Jesus, the incarnate One, the One who is both human and divine. He is the word made flesh, and in his humanity, and divinity, he can be experienced in our hearts and minds. It isn't that we feed on him by believing certain things about him, like how he is both human and divine, but we feed on him by entering into relationship with him, and in our humanity we are joined to him, and are nourished by his life, just as the branches are nourished by the life that flows through the vine.

And the eating of this bread that is Jesus brings abundance, not the satiety of a craving, but a peaceful fullness. Like the manna which was provided in the wilderness, there is always enough for our daily needs. The bread that Jesus gives us feeds us day by day, as we follow the pilgrim's path, trusting in him to guide us through the wilderness places as well as the valleys of joy and plenty. Our world tells us to grab what we can, to store it up for ourselves. God in Christ invites us to receive

thankfully of the spiritual food that is a sign of God's unending love for us.

And eating this Bread that comes down from Heaven transforms us, not through some kind of religious magic, but through revealing God in the ordinary stuff of life, bread and wine, things we can touch and smell and taste. Remember, in the psalm we read, taste and see that the Lord is good! At the offertory, we bring up the bread and the wine, grain from the earth, fruit of the vine, signs of the bounty of God's good earth, signs of our labor and offering back to God what we have been given. At this Holy Table, in this sacrament, they are blessed and given back to us, and as we receive Jesus we receive ourselves back again, broken yet whole, imperfect, and yet transformed!

St. Augustine said of the living bread of the Eucharist "Believe what you see, see what you believe, and become what you are: the Body of Christ. When we say Amen we are saying Yes! I believe this is the body and blood of Christ, and I will be the Body of Christ to others." Just as Jesus did, we too, can offer the bread of our lives, wounded, healed, broken, and yet transformed, for others. We can break the bread

of life with them, and the blessing of the living Bread from Heaven will be shared forever. Amen.