

August 1st, 2021

Year B; 10th Pentecost

Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15

Psalm 78: 23-29

John 6: 24-35

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

John 6:24-35

The next day, when the people who remained after the feeding of the five thousand saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?”

Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Our gospel today from John is the 2nd of 5 Sundays in which we hear about the bread. Last Sunday, the focus was on the Feeding of the 5000, with the fish and the bread being enough for all, and ample leftovers too. The coming three Sundays will continue today’s focus on the “bread of life”.

After the concrete story of the people hungry, and the small donation from the boy, 5 loaves and 3 fishes, miraculously growing to offer hospitality and plenty to all; after that story that we can picture and grasp, this week begins the puzzling talk from Jesus, that now HE is the bread of life.

Jesus tells the folks who pursued him:

For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Now this bread is not a loaf you can hold in your hands and eat to fill your tummy, no this bread is Jesus, himself!

While that loaf fills you up, you will still get hungry again in a few hours. But Jesus tells the folks, you come and find me, the bread of life, you will never be hungry again.

Never hungry again? How can this be? Where can we find this bread of life?
Hmmm...

Our first thoughts likely go to communion, the Eucharist, yes.
Communion for many is a hope to draw close to Jesus.

I often feel like that woman we talked about weeks ago, reaching, yearning to touch the hem of Jesus' robe.

I reach out some weeks as I receive the bread, and I know my fingers skimmed the hem, others my hand comes up empty.

We want things to be concrete, understandable, like a loaf of bread we can eat and feel full.

But understanding the bread of life, and then being called to share the bread of life with others?

Sounds nearly impossible!!

Ok, so when things feel impossible, elusive, incomprehensible, I find a story can help.

This story took place about 6 weeks ago.

I was pulling out of the parking lot at the Kilmarnock post office, turning left onto Route 3, Main Street, and a lady made a hand gesture in my direction. Not a wave, not a thumbs up. She looked angry, and then her hand did too.

Now to back up a little in the story, I had been driving around doing errands and crying. We had put our sweet dog Bix down a few days before, and I was sad and grieving, and emotional, and tired. One of my errands was to drop off a few letters in the mailbox. I did so, still crying, and then went to turn left out of the post office, heading to the bank.

Being tired and weepy my judgement and attention were not great, and I immediately realized I had pulled out too close to that woman in her truck, driving towards me.

I probably scared her; she scared me.

I was wrong, and still weeping, and felt bad. And she responded with that hand gesture, offered with clear definition and intention.

I wished the world moved more slowly so I could explain about Bix and how tired I was.

And I hold out a lot of hope that she would have understood my defective judgment in cutting things too close for comfort, as I pulled out of the post office.

But the world moves fast, and I cut it close, and she gestured, and we both went in opposite directions on Main St.

And we both needed the bread of life.

I like to imagine us stopping in the middle of the road and getting out to share communion. To offer each other compassion, the way Jesus would and did.

I started this sermon on Thursday, and looking back I realize I was a bit cranky and negative as I wrote, and it showed in the sermon I wrote.

I was fed up with our world where, if you are a police officer who gives

testimony, if you tell the story of defending the US Capitol, and the injuries you received at the hands of people trying to crush you in a doorway, while beating you in the head with your gas mask, then people on television will call you weak and overly dramatic. I was cranky about our world.

And then to hear of a gymnast who is talented in ways we have never seen before, a masterful athlete, who makes her own decision that she can not compete in the Olympics and needs to withdraw to care for her own mental health. And then that gymnast gets called names too by people on television, she is called a quitter. I was perhaps more than cranky about how we treat one another, and it showed in my sermon.

So I decided I needed to start the sermon over. Jesus is not cranky. Then I went to Chair Yoga on Friday. And at the end of our class our teacher, Jenny, read a quote from Mother Teresa. And I was led again.... back to the bread of life.

The quote reads:

“People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

The good you do today, may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.”

The bread of life, God’s compassion, preached by a petite nun who worked her whole life with the poor, with the dying, a woman who had her own times of doubt, and sadness and depression, who wrestled too with God, and who still kept preaching.....

Forgiveness anyway

Kindness anyway

Creating anyway

Goodness, anyway

The bread of life, always, anyway.

Amen.