

Pentecost 9th Sunday “Food for the Soul” August 2 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Food is such a good image that Jesus makes tremendous use of it. The Kingdom of God is probably compared to a great feast in Holy Scripture as much or more than to anything else. That’s what we get in today’s Bible readings: food imagery. Isaiah summons the folks to a feast and Jesus feeds the thousands. Isaiah offers food at no cost. You don’t labor for this feast. Jesus feeds the multitudes with bread and fish which miraculously are multiplied. No sweaty brows here, but a taste of Eden restored.

Of course, we have a regular reminder of this. The Lord’s Supper is an actualization of the food metaphor. Jesus invites us to dine upon himself. We take the Holy One and the holiness of God inside ourselves and the old adage of “you are what you eat” becomes more and more true in us as we return to that table time and again. We call it “the foretaste of the feast to come,” a bit of heaven here on earth. It is the very forgiveness of sins of which we partake. It is the kingdom of God which we genuinely can sink our teeth into.

Let us consider for just a moment the powerful impact of food on our lives and see therein the very Gospel message.

We need food to survive, the calories are essential to the sustaining of this bodily life. Food is essential to community. Try throwing a party without food. It does not work. Women have often joked that the way into a man’s heart is through his stomach. Successful salesmen often take a client to lunch, aware that it is harder to say no to someone with whom you have eaten. Food unites us and reunites us. All our most important family events usually center on a meal. Reunions, Weddings, Thanksgiving and Christmas, and many more events almost always involve a feast of some sort. Food communicates important things. Our first experience of love from our mother was really as she fed us. It is primordial in its effect on us. We give chocolates to our sweetie on Valentine’s Day. Food has certain connotations for us. Turkey is eaten on Thanksgiving, hot cross buns on the weekend of Easter. God gave bitter herbs and unleavened bread to remind the people of the exodus. There are certain foods that our mom can prepare which will bring us back to childhood almost immediately

God in fatherly divine goodness and mercy does indeed provide for all our needs of body and soul. God provides for the whole person, intellectual, spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational. The Lord makes all this happen. We cannot create this, we can grow the physical food, but it is God who makes the food. The Daily Bread of the Lord's Prayer is really, as Luther notes, is about the whole person, body and soul.

Matthew's miracle of feeding the multitude appears in all four of the Gospel accounts, so we get it every year. The Holy Spirit must have thought it was really important that he repeated it four times for us. This seems like the spiritual equivalent of a 2x4 to the head. If you don't get it by the fourth time you have to be pretty thick.

Each of the tellings, however, is a little different. Like the resurrection stories, each Gospel writer wants you to see something just a little different here. Matthew paints a picture of Jesus wanting to get away by himself. Just before this, in the earlier verses of chapter 14, Jesus heard of John the Baptist's brutal death at Herod's hands. He seeks some time alone, understandably, but now he sees the suffering of these people. His love and compassion, however, draws Jesus back to the crowd. He is moved, viscerally moved to do something for them. He heals and teaches the multitudes that have streamed from the towns and villages to seek him out. Jesus' priorities are demonstrated here. He is seeking time to be alone, but He puts their needs first. This compassion will bring him to the Cross.

The Christian who is washed in the water of Baptism is imbued with the Spirit of Jesus. This same compassion lives in us. The Jesus who said, "You feed them" is also speaking to us, and filling us with the faith of the disciples and empowering our service.

The disciples are worried. They recognize the crowd's spiritual hunger for Jesus, but are thinking of a much different problem. Hungry people are grumpy people. Jesus says, "Give them something to eat." To the disciples it is an impossible command. The disciples plead to limited resources and show Him the five loaves of bread and two fish, not really enough even for the twelve of them to have much more than a bite. But Jesus says, "Bring it here."

I think it is important to notice that Jesus asks for **all** that they have. He does not say that they should hold back enough for themselves and then share the excess. He asks for it all.

He blesses and breaks the five loaves and presumably hands them back to the disciples and tells them to feed the crowds now seated on the grass. At this point Peter and the gang are holding five loaves of bread and two fish and looking at five thousand hungry men. I wonder if they **whispered** “Come and get it.”

I imagine them reaching into a basket with five pieces of bread and getting to the sixth person and wondering what would happen. There was another piece of bread, and another, and another. Finally, we are told that all five thousand were fed, and that was just counting the men. Who knows how many women and children were there too. Just in case you are really dense and missed the implication of Christ feeding the nation of Israel like Moses in the wilderness, Matthew tells you that they gathered twelve baskets of leftovers.

Malachi, in chapter 3:10, exhorts the people to bring the whole tithe and see if God won't open up the very heavens for us. Jesus issues a test to the disciples. Bring it to me, I will bless it, and we will see what happens. But if you never bring the bread and fish, and he never blesses them, then nothing happens. You have five loaves and two fish.

How often don't we tell Jesus to solve our congregation's budget problems, and then we will help our neighbors. I think this text is suggesting that we step out in faith. That we actually start to help our neighbors. God will take care of the resources, God will take care of the congregation which is engaged in his ministry. As He said, “You feed them.” When we pray for the lost, we should expect Him to turn to us and say, “You go to them, you help them.”

But, sin has rendered us stupid about a lot of things. We think we earn our money, we think we own our house, we think we control our own bodies. All good comes from God and it is utter thick-headedness which refuses to recognize it. We don't really control things! It's an illusion. As a result we often expend energy on things that don't satisfy us and bread that does not really feed us. We look for healing from the wrong places and contentment in the accumulation of things. We are just as miserable as before but now we have a bunch of things which seem to mock us with their presence and our misery.

God has charged his people with a hefty responsibility. Go make disciples of all nations. I have a hard enough time with my own house and a neighbor or two. My resources look too thin for that charge. My congregation is either too busy or too old. What can **we** do?

God's promises are hard to believe. He persistently refuses to prove Himself to our satisfaction, but points us to distant people like David and uses them as a witness. He calls for us to believe him without the undergirding support which our empirical minds crave. It terrifies us.

Come and buy without money. We are chided for investing our effort in the wrong place, bread that is not bread and things which do not satisfy. Listen and eat, delight in a rich food, incline your ear. Have we switched metaphors? It is as though we are feasting through our ears. Yet, this listening as eating picture is not entirely absent from our experience. We can feast on a concert or say that music is a feast for our ears. Our local newspaper has probably used the image to describe the summer concert series in our community.

This listening feast is not a concert. It is food because we need it to live, it delights our ears because it is the beautiful and wonderful word of God. It is a covenant like the covenant which He made with his beloved David. He went from nothing, a shepherd boy to becoming the great king of an ancient superpower. His rise from obscurity to the very heights is the witness to God's promise making and keeping.

What is he promising us? The people at the time of Isaiah were to call a nation they did not know. That nation shall run to them because God has glorified them. I don't think you have to stretch your imagination too far to see that the gentile nations which have been streaming into our country the past several generations are what Isaiah is talking about.

Too often we have hidden the oddness of our faith. We try to make ourselves palatable to the general public lest they think us strange. We see how they treat strange people and we don't want that to happen to us. But God has done a really strange thing in the incarnation, a truly odd deed. No self-respecting ruler of the universe gives up his power and becomes a helpless infant in a manger, carried by his parents in a flight to Egypt as they flee from a doddering fool of a tyrant like Herod. No God worth his salt will be found on a cross, dying for the miserable little wretches that screwed up his creation. But there he is. Has our aversion to being odd kept our most potent Gospel weapon under wraps?

Isaiah calls us to buy without money. Jesus feeds the multitudes with bread they have not sweated to grow, mill, or bake and fish they have not labored to catch, clean, and cook. No one did, that is the point. Beyond the starter loaves and fish, this was outside the Genesis 3 consequences of Sin.

Of course, this whole feast is Christ to us and for us. He has given us the life which we could not obtain or retain. He has washed us of our sins. He has restored us to the grace and love of God our Creator. More than that, He has given us his very relationship with God and we may now call God "Our Father."

It is not only foolish to try and buy this bread with money or works of any kind, it is downright insulting. If we offer our beloved money someone's affections, we have turned their love into prostitution. God's great love for us is simply not for sale. He does not respond to our goodness; rather, He has responded to our destitution and depravity. He has sent his Son because we were penniless waifs, helpless corpses.

Now he has gone beyond what we were created to be and included us in the very household of God. And today he would liken this to a feast. And lest we forget it, He has made this message into the very real feast we are given to enjoy at this altar.

Here he comes into our lives and makes his home with us. Here he unites us with one another. Here he gives us life itself. Here he gives us joy. Here he blesses us with his righteousness.

Come and eat without cost, be transformed into another sort of people. Be a people loved in such a way, with such forgiveness, through such a sacrifice, that we cannot help but reach out to others in clear witness and caring acts of service to our neighbor.

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!