

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

John 6:35,41-51

I Kings 19:4-8

Psalm 34:1-8

Ephesians 4:25—5:2

August 11, 2024

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

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I learned an important fact while I was hiking in Scotland. Fruits and vegetables are few and far between. Well...let me rephrase that...fruits and vegetables, excluding potatoes, are few and far between. In fact, the day my friend Susan and I found a grocery store and were able to buy salad greens and avocados was better than waking up on Christmas morning.

Despite the lack of a well-balanced diet, what we did have in abundance was bread. All kinds of bread. Fresh rolls, homemade scones and whole grain slices of warm bread at dinner. All served with butter and jam.

The most basic of ingredients. And it was wonderful.

There is something deeply comforting about food that is provided for you when you are travelling. It's an opportunity to embrace the gifts that are offered, gifts of hospitality, friendship, and care. Gifts that tell you, you are welcome here so come and sit and eat and be fed.

To sit and eat and be fed. The simplest of joys.

I was struck by how little we needed to feel satisfied. In fact, my sabbatical reminded me that joy isn't found in the quantity of the things we have. Instead, it reminded me that true joy is measured in the kindness that we were given and in the kindness that we give. This is the bread of life.

Jesus speaks of bread in the same, simple way. It is a way of life that has no monetary cost. It is a way of life that doesn't require any special talent. It doesn't ask that you prove yourself to anyone. It just asks that you take this bread and be fed. That you let it nourish you. That you let it change you.

And yet, I find it interesting that we are always so hungry. Hungry for things that may fill us up for a time but ultimately leave us empty with a pit in our stomachs. That pit surfaces in our fear of not measuring up, of not having the right house, the right car, the right clothes. It shows up in our suspicion that someone else might get what we feel we deserve. It shows up in our inability to welcome the stranger, to listen to those whom we disagree with. It shows up in our resistance to reach across our differences and sit at the same table and eat the same bread.

Because as the conventional thinking goes...there may not be enough to go around. And so, we take on a perspective of scarcity. And in doing so, we are unable to sit at the table long enough

to allow our hearts to be fed and we forget that God's goodness is abundant. We forget that God's love has no boundaries.

We make the simplest of joys so complicated. In our Gospel reading this morning, when Jesus tells the people around him that he is the bread of life, when he points to the simple gift of nourishment through faith, the people are taken back. They don't want to hear it. They start complaining. Who does this guy think he is? He can't sustain us. It won't work. Nothing is that simple.

Ever wonder why they were so resistant?

I mean, here was this generous gift of hospitality, of life. And the people couldn't accept it. I have a suspicion that their resistance was because they had made this incredible gift of life conditional...of who deserves to be fed and who doesn't. They couldn't let go of the things they had become accustomed to, the rules, the judgements, the definitions of who was in and who was out. And the simplicity of the bread that Jesus offered felt more like a sacrifice to their way of life than an overflowing provision that expanded everyone's life.

I also think their resistance came because the bread that Jesus was offering wasn't just about grace. It wasn't a passive grace that Jesus had in mind. By inviting everyone to come to the table and be fed, Jesus knew that by being fed, they would then be nourished. And once they were nourished, they would have the strength to feed others. The scarcity mentality would disappear. And, that requires new behaviors, new beliefs, new ways of living.

Theologian Diana Butler Bass calls this bread of life an intertwining of behavior and grace. An intertwining that is rooted in God's love not just for you but for every single one of God's children. And that love calls us to sit at the same table together. To share the goodness of that bread. And then it calls us to a new life in community.

What does that nourishment look like? Read our text from Ephesians. It defines this new community through our actions. Speak honestly. Let go of lingering anger. Live with integrity. Practice kindness. Don't gossip or talk bad about someone else. Share what you have with those in need. Set aside bitterness. Forgive one another. Love. Really love! Those are the simple ingredients.

So come and sit and eat and be fed. These are the simplest of joys. The most basic ingredients to a changed life. The most basic ingredients to a changed world. This is the bread of life.

Amen.