

November 24, 2019—-Thanksgiving Sunday and Christ the King Sunday

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

26 When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, 2 you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. 3 You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us." 4 When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, 5 you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6 When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7 we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8 The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9 and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me." You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. 11 Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

John 6:25-35 (NRSV)

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 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. 27 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." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 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?" 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 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. 33 For the bread of God is that which[a] comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35 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."

## Sermon: Bread of Heaven

A few years ago there was a 20th anniversary celebrated! Yes, it was that tag line “Got Milk?”

It is perhaps the most boring product imaginable said the advertising team for the California Milk Processor Board in 1993 but they made the tag line work.

You may remember the many advertisements we saw of people with milk covered lips. It made us want to drink milk, right?

AND, as we know, it became a tag line for lots of other products.

I guess, if want to stretch the tag line to faith as some have done, we could ask, “Got Jesus?”

In the early days of Jesus ministry, people were trying to follow Jesus teaching and his radical way of explaining a faith that mattered. The gospel writers were years later asking “Got Jesus” or remembering that people were always asking, “Who is Jesus?”

In this Thanksgiving gospel, Jesus has been with the people teaching and feeding them. The miracle of the feeding of the thousands with a small amount of food is the amazing story of the day. It should have been enough but they could not grasp the deeper meaning of the miracle.

They wanted more signs, more miracles but Jesus simply told them about God’s love and unbiased care for all creation. Jesus decides, in this passage from John, to use the occasion for a metaphor with the sign he has given them.

They are filled with food and he wants them to be filled with more than food, with God, with spiritual food. Will they get it, will they understand? Probably NOT!

The teaching is given in this way: The food that endures is food from heaven. Who is that food? The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 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.”

Let’s ask what Jesus being the “bread of life” means for us and why it is important for us to have spiritual food on this journey we call life.

1. Bread sustains. When we are hungry we turn to food that gives us nourishment and strength. Our bodies can’t function without food and water; we must nourish the body for our bodies to be healthy and strong. We nourish faith for our faith to be strong and healthy.

When I substitute teach at the Middle School in Yazoo City where I live, I can't help but encourage the students to eat their vegetables, to drink their milk, to taste the foods that they think they will not like. Most of the time, they push the nutritious food aside and eat the salty fried chips they buy. The pears and apples go in the trash.

This a simple illustration but says something about how all of us satisfy our hunger, not just hungry teenagers. We want something that tastes good, easy to eat and gives a quick sense of being filled.

In our culture today, we see ourselves doing the same. We want a quick fix to the hungers for answers to our spiritual questions about the meaning of life, faith and the connection to the Divine. We choose to fill our spiritual hungers with "feel good" theology. We want an easy tag line or "fix!"

Nothing wrong with some of those easy tag lines but the spiritual food that will nourish us and keep us healthy and strong in faith may need to be more substantial. Yes, we push prayer, study, community, mission, outreach, more prayer, for depth of faith and hunger to be filled. Heavenly "bread" sustains and it endures.

2. Bread endures. The relationship we yearn for with God endures when we work on it. All through the fourth Gospel, John speaks about the mystery of Christ made flesh and living among us. John speaks poetically about an "abiding" quality that draws us to God in Christ. Can this endurance help us? Yes.

Simply put, we stress "enduring" or "abiding" so that the bond between us and God is strong and lasting. It endures all. Whatever happens in life, we can endure it because of God's closeness, God's living in us and abiding in us.

1 Corinthians 13:7 (NRSV) speaks about this bond: **It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

Life with all of its frailties and disappointments can plunge us into despair. That's why we remember that Jesus feeds us and nourishes a bond that endures.

3. Bread sustains, endures and is not just about the past but about the present and future.

We ask, "Who is Jesus?" or, "Got Jesus?" because, in our Christian tradition, Jesus is the cornerstone of our understanding of the nature of God. When we speak of Jesus on Christ the King Sunday as the ruler of our hearts, we are speaking with God images that keep us connected and focused on relationship to "ruler of our hearts."

In the discussion with Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus pointed to a birth beyond birth. In chapter 4 and the conversation with the woman at the well, he pointed to water

beyond water. Now. Jesus points to bread beyond bread, to that gift from God which not only comes to the world through Jesus, but is in fact Jesus himself.

As Advent Sundays approach, we have opportunity to think, pray, and prepare for new encounters of closeness to God with images of Jesus and his humanity.

My hope is that our desire to know God in a deeper way, as the “bread of heaven,” will land us in a place of remembering that Jesus came to point us toward loving the world and our neighbors. Ultimately, our gratitude for life means we advocate for those who need real bread and real compassion.

We believe as Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen says “To love, to laugh, to live, to work, to fail, to despair, to parent, to cry, to die, to mourn, to hope: these attributes exist whether we are Vietnamese, or Mexican or American or any other form of classification. All humanity is designed to seek the companionship of others and the relationship of One who guides us to lives of gratitude and blessing.” (NYT, Five Stories of Immigrants 11/24/2019)

Today with the writers of Deuteronomy who tell us of the struggles of the Israelite people long ago, we lift up difficult journeys made by individuals, families, and the larger community. We think of those who have made the hard journey to freedom, safety and a better life in this country and we pray we will open our doors with hospitality and care to many more.

We lift those who live on farms and work the land. We give thanks and offer to God our recognition of everything in our lives that promotes life, health, and peace. We give thanks for all that is unique to the places we live and people with whom we share community.

Yes, we journey with our stomachs full but never forget that we must fill ourselves with God’s good gifts, the Bread of Heaven, so that our longing and purpose to live life in God’s grace is realized.

We part with this inclusive language version of Psalm 100 and gather to give thanks!

*Be Joyful—everybody—  
Muslims, Christians, Pagans, Atheists  
Gladly serve the good  
Rejoice in the gift of life.*

*Highest above, deepest within  
Around us in nature, present in each.  
We are yours, You are ours  
We enter your presence with Thanksgiving  
With chants and songs  
With grateful hearts and open hands  
And know a flash of eternity. May it be so. Amen*