

The Rev. Ryan Fischer
St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13)
August 1, 2021

Lectionary Year B: Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; John 6:24-35

The Revised Common Lectionary, which guides us through the Bible with Old Testament and New Testament readings (and always including something from one of the four Gospels), began a series of readings last Sunday from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. With our brief interruption to the Lectionary schedule on St. Anne's Day, we didn't hear the beginning of this series, but if I mentioned the Feeding of the Five Thousand, you'd likely know how the series started.

Today, we enter into that portion of the sixth chapter of John dealing with the Bread of Life. Now these are familiar words – Jesus talking about himself as the Bread that comes down from heaven. But if we were to look into the Old Testament as well as the New, we see the connection there that God is the One who provides for hungry people, and you know from the book of Exodus that the Israelites were being led out of Egypt into the Promised Land. (Do you remember how long that journey took? Forty years!) And on the way they got hungry, they complained, and the Lord gave them bread from heaven to eat.

I once heard a fellow recalling the words of rabbis from years past who commented that the Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness because they needed to forget about Egypt. I thought that was very striking. They needed that time to forget about the oppression and suffering that they faced, and I'm sure spending forty years in the wilderness gave them

time to focus on other things...like not having enough food, like feeling lost, like feeling directionless. But there, in the midst of that isolation, this manna comes down from heaven, and, of course, it's echoed again in the New Testament in the Gospel of John, where Jesus proclaims himself to be the Bread from heaven.

And we, naturally, hear that and we start thinking about Jesus as we receive him in Holy Communion...that what we receive at the Table is, indeed, Bread from heaven, and that we eat of this unto eternal life. This is what Jesus provides for us. But Jesus wants us to be sure, too, that we are not merely thinking about our *earthly* needs, that we are not merely thinking about our *earthly* desires, but rather that *heavenly* need that we have – to be fed and to be nourished, not just with regular food but *heavenly* food.

And we know, too, that in the Gospel of John, in particular, there is no account of the Last Supper; there is, before Jesus is handed over to suffering and death, a foot washing instead of a Last Supper, as you may recall. So we look to the Gospel of John in the sixth chapter for those things that get us thinking about the Eucharist...that this gift that we receive here is that great food that we receive from heaven, and it is food that can feed us unto eternal life.

It is, as Jesus said, not merely like the manna that fell from the sky and became the food for the Israelites. That was just a little bit to get them on their way. No, this Bread from heaven that we receive now from Jesus is that which feeds us unto eternal life. Thank God for that

great gift! It is one of the most precious things that we have as believers in Christ in the Church...

As we think about what we receive in Jesus in the Eucharist, it is so precious and so important to our spiritual lives that we might want to receive it as often as we can...on every Lord's Day, which was the norm in the early church, and became the norm in the Episcopal Church upon the release of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. Countless Low Church Episcopalians, however, can remember receiving the Sacrament only once or twice a month, and, more recently, the pandemic forced us into a prolonged eucharistic "fast" in which we went *months* without the Sacrament. I can't imagine such fasts are very healthy!

We recognize, therefore, that this Bread from heaven is something that cannot be worn out, that we might want to receive on every Lord's Day, and that we might eat and drink of it until the day comes when we are called home to our heavenly Father. This is the real meal that sustains us. This is the real meal that gives us life. This is the real meal that offers us our Lord's very presence in his own Body and Blood.

Know that, when you receive Holy Communion, you are not receiving a mere symbol or token or cute gesture; we are not play-acting or reenacting the Last Supper...we are celebrating *every day* and *every time* we gather the Bread from heaven that we eat unto eternal life. And Jesus is very clear about the distinction between appearance and reality; he reminds his people there that "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” (John 6:32b-33).

And then what do they say? They say, “Sir, give us this bread always” (John 6:34).

When Jesus taught, it was often the case that the people around him – and especially his disciples who were in his inner circle – didn’t always *get* what was going on, so Jesus could become quite frustrated with these rather slow learning people. But it turns out in this case that something sparked. They said, “Give us this bread always.”

Now if Jesus were to come to us and explain this, maybe something might spark in us, too...that we also might want to receive that Bread always, that as often as we come to worship we receive it and treasure it and remember Jesus’ own words: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

We can think of all sorts of hungers and thirsts that we might have – as a matter of fact, many of us probably haven’t had breakfast this morning so we might be a little hungry by the time this service is over – but at the same time we remember that, as we receive the Eucharist, whatever earthly or physical hunger is satisfied beyond measure with food for the soul and food unto eternal life. Think, too, that a spiritual starvation can be just as debilitating as an earthly or physical starvation, and so we are fed with the spiritual food that sustains us for the journey toward eternal life.

And, for this food, we rightly give God thanks!

We give thanks to God for his Son Jesus Christ who is the true Bread from heaven. Jesus feeds us so that we may never be hungry, nor will we ever be thirsty. This is where we are fed to accomplish exactly that, that we might not hunger or thirst anymore.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.