

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

I Kings 19:4-8

Psalms 34:1-8

Ephesians 4:25—5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

08/11/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

35 Jesus said to [the crowd,] “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” 41 Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” 42 They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” 43 Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Bread of Life

Good morning! We take a few preaching classes in seminary, and as part of my Preaching Public Issues class I decided to preach about whether it was ethical to eat meat. As my sermon intro I described a delicious steak meal, and I was critiqued by the professor for doing such a good job that the introduction was apparently distracting from the rest of the sermon. I wasn't aware that was possible! But if you have been paying attention to the Gospel lessons over the past few weeks, you're liable to have the opposite reaction. This section of the Gospel of John is often called the "bread of life" discourse, and if you're like me, you might be feeling a little gluten intolerant. But we soldier on! Because the topic of bread will remain a key "ingredient" for the next few weeks. Now, if you think we can't talk about bread that much, believe me, it will "rise" to the occasion, let that bake for a while... man... I'm on a roll!

We begin where we left off last week with verse 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.'*" And just like the previous weeks, we're reminded of the text's connection with the Exodus story and Moses. But here Jesus begins with a very important grammatical phrase. "I am" would have been immediately recognizable to the crowd who would have remembered God's revelation in Exodus 3. "*But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your*

*ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14God said to Moses, " I AM WHO I AM."*¹

So when Jesus uses the "I Am," it's a serious description of who he is and how he wants the crowds to see him. As one scholar writes: "*The question of Jesus' identity is not merely a matter of curiosity; it carries profound implications for Jesus' audience and for Christianity today.*"² And it's that question that I have been pondering all week. Who is Jesus? What has he revealed to us in Scripture, specifically about who he is?

As the summer comes to an end it makes me think of the many church camps across the country that are beginning to wrap up their programs. I have talked often about the impact that Camp Luther had on my own faith, and I am again reminded of the ways that camp can be such a transformational experience. In our lives we often grow to fit into boxes and descriptions that we either no longer match, or which were given so long ago we feel stuck within them. One of the great things about camp is that a person can show up and cast off those inaccurate descriptions. They can be who they WANT to be, they can be the best version of themselves. It's a fresh start, a new beginning.

The challenge comes from those who may have known us before, just as the crowd in today's Gospel knows Jesus. "*41Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."* *42They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'"* It's a callback to the story we read just last week in I

¹ Exodus 3:13-14a NRSV

²<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-2/commentary-on-john-635-41-51-6>

Kings where the Israelites complained to Moses before God gave them the manna from heaven.³ They misunderstood God then, and they misunderstand Jesus now. Which brings us back to that central question about Jesus' identity...

In our lesson today he reveals that he is the bread of life, that no-one who believes in him will go hungry. It's clearly symbolic. And as one scholar points out: *"Symbols serve as a bridge, making it easier to comprehend an idea or a reality that is often challenging to grasp. They 'convey something of transcendent significance through something accessible to the senses."*⁴

And so we look at the text through this symbol with which Jesus describes himself, that of bread. And importantly, like those going to a church camp, we need to see this through a fresh lens Jesus has presented us with. In the text today, the church can unfortunately compare itself most readily to the crowds and how said crowd responds. The more time we have spent in the church the more likely we are to see it like the crowd, through a perspective that thinks it knows everything that God can and will do, through a lens that can often become comfortable with what it has grown accustomed to seeing, all the while blinding us to the work that God has in store for us.

What we are shown instead is something new, something fresh, something only God could think up. Sometimes that work is the result of God taking tiny little steps in our hearts over months and years. Other times God calls for drastic and immediate change. If we try to force our own

³<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-2/commentary-on-john-635-41-51-2>

⁴<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-19-2/commentary-on-john-635-41-51-6>

plan, we end up burnt out and exhausted. But if we remain faithful, we are shown a more perfect way. We gather together in community not in fear or anxiety, but in hope and trust that God is in control. We gather together to sing, we gather together to read scripture and pray. And most importantly, we gather together to break bread and drink wine, taking part in a communion that transcends the merely symbolic and becomes a source of everlasting life. Real and tangible... right before us. Amen.