

Pentecost 12 (Proper 14), August 12, 2018, Sermon: Bread of Life

Text: John 6:35–51

Other Lessons: Psalm 34:1–8; Ephesians 4:17–5:2; 1 Kings 19:1–8

1 Kings 19:1–8

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” ³ Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴ But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” ⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” ⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

Ephesians 4:17–5:2

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up,

as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

John 6:35–51

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” ⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will 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 he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers 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. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

You know almost every time you turn on the TV you are asked by one group or another to help end hunger. This happens even more so around Thanksgiving and Christmas. Most years we collect

food for our local food pantry. There are some churches which set aside a Sunday each year to collect an offering to end hunger. One organization's motto is "Have faith. End hunger." I thought about that as I was reading our Gospel text, especially John 6:35 & 48 where Jesus calls Himself "The Bread of Life" given, as He states in verse 51, "for the life of the world." Jesus says in our text that those who come to him will never hunger. John 6 presents Jesus as the true and satisfying bread given for the life of the world. That means every Sunday is an "End World Hunger Sunday." Every week, every day, Christ provides the Bread of Life for the world.

The Bible is filled with references to bread, food, nourishment, and so forth. The most obvious example is the one Jesus refers to in v 49: **"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died."** There are also many places in the Old Testament that refer to food and drink and hospitality offered at meals. From "a land flowing with milk and honey" to the "give us this day our daily bread" of the Lord's Prayer, there's much said in Scripture about food and daily sustenance.

Not only did God provide manna for the Israelites in their journey in the wilderness, but he also provided careful instructions to his people regarding proper eating and diet and laws regarding how it was to be consumed. Luke's Gospel provides at least nine examples of Jesus teaching the Gospel in the context of food and

table fellowship. When I took the class on Luke at the Seminary, it was led by Arthur A. Just Jr. who wrote a book on the subject, *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus*. For him it seemed that all of the Gospel of Luke was about Table Fellowship.

The question is not how many times does the Bible refer to food, but where does the Bible not speak of food? The answer is, not very often. But more important, and to the point of John 6, what is Jesus referring to in His reference to Himself as “the bread of life”?

New Testament scholars have long debated and discussed among one another whether or not John 6 is a text concerning the Lord’s Supper. I had the unique opportunity when I was at the Sem to hear two of our professors debate the question. This preacher believes that it is about the Lord’s Supper. To paraphrase one of the professors “If it walks like a duck, looks like a duck and quacks like a duck it must be a duck.” but this sermon will not attempt to define or defend this. The proclamation speaks for itself in this regard. But there is a question regarding John 6 that needs to be raised. The first three Gospels depict Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper in the context of His death through the shedding of His blood on the cross the very next day. Paul’s references to the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10–11 corroborate the first three

Gospels by connecting Jesus' death to the Lord's Supper and to Jesus' second coming with these words: **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”** As other scholars have pointed out, this poses at least one difficulty, or raises an interesting question: “Is the Lord's Supper so attached to Jesus' death that it is unrelated to what He did earlier during His public ministry?”

Jesus' language here in John 6 provides an answer to this vital question. Just as Israel was sustained on a daily basis by eating the manna in the wilderness, Jesus points to Himself as the bread of life—an interesting contrast to the association of the Last Supper with his death. Furthermore, this bread is associated with and connected to everyday life. How many of us think about the Lord's Supper being necessary for life every day?

This also is obvious in the Old Testament Reading for this morning. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah finds himself having to flee from wicked Queen Jezebel. As he literally runs for his life, the text tells us that he wanted to die. But instead of permitting this, God sends an angel to his side. Immediately, the angel invites Elijah to arise and eat and drink. Elijah does so, falls asleep, rises, and the angel invites him to eat a second time. God was right there for Elijah—to nourish, sustain, and protect him from the murderous queen.

This text brings to light the problem of unbelief concerning this issue, the eating and drinking of Jesus' Body and Blood. Many times in the Gospels, Jesus is being opposed by the religious leaders. Surprisingly in John 6, His words are directed to the struggles and unbelief of his own disciples. This discourse was directed at both the disciples and 'The Jews.' We see this when we look at verse 36 and the continuation of the discourse in verse 60 **“When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”** as well as verse 52 **“The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”** As a result, many abandoned Jesus, not because they didn't believe He was referring to Himself as the Bread of Life and that the literal eating and drinking would provide ultimate satisfaction for his hunger and thirst, but precisely because they did understand that this is what He meant, and many turned away.

There are many today who seek spiritual sustenance in other forms, precisely because they don't believe in the one that Jesus presents to us as he tells us he's **“the bread of life.”** The Sacrament of Christ's body and blood is available to us today even as it was to the disciples and those who heard Jesus speak these words. But these words are rejected by many now as they were then. They are still very much, as His disciples said, **“a hard**

saying.” Instead of believing that Jesus is the bread of life and that he nourishes the Church and individual Christians through the Sacrament of his body and blood, many look for more exciting and dynamic ways of being spiritual. There are numerous sects and cults that do not believe the Lord’s Supper brings the true presence of Jesus.

John’s Gospel calls unbelievers to a confession of faith. In John 20:31, Jesus says, **“But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”**

Elijah trusted God in the wilderness; Israel relied on the promises of God in order to reach the Promised Land; the disciples who did not abandon Jesus cried out, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”** So also it is today. Jesus presents Himself to an unbelieving world as the bread of life and as the very life of the world. Organizations like “Bread for the World” provide food to sustain the body in this world. The more important and most vital mission of the Church is to continue to communicate to a dying world that here is a bread and a drink that will bring new and eternal life. This bread and this drink is Jesus himself, who is present as He has told us that He is, **“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give**

for the life of the world is my flesh.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.