

A couple of weeks ago, our Gospel lesson led us off into the story about Jesus' miraculous feeding of over 5,000 people with only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish at hand. You may recall how he and the disciples were followed by large crowds who had heard about the amazing healings that people had experienced through him. And how Jesus had taken pity on them, *compassion* the text said, and he had gathered them around and spent the day talking with them and teaching them. But before sending them away, he had blessed those 5 loaves and 2 dried fish, which became supper for every single soul in that huge crowd. Remember, there was such an abundance that the disciples gathered twelve basketsful of leftovers!

Well, you go home with a belly full of bread of fish and a head full of wonder and sleep through the night and rise the next day, and what do you do? What do you and all your neighbors and all the rest who had been caught up in that totally extraordinary event of the day before, set out to do? You go looking for this miracle worker who's still in the area, and if you live on the Sea of Galilee, that means you hop in a boat and head out across the water, keeping close to the shore because that's where you will likely find him, spot Jesus and his troop of disciples and likely others in tow.

That's where our text this morning picks up the story, there with Jesus caught up again in the midst of an enthusiastic crowd of people, likely excited to have found him. But his response to them was a bit hard. All they wanted from him, he said, was a free meal. They had put in a tremendous effort to find him, and all for something that was only going to satisfy them for the moment.

They would be far better off, he told them, if they worked that hard for something that would fill the on-going hunger within them *forever!*

“Work for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, he told them. “For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” The crowd listened and asked Jesus just what kind of “work” that was. They seemed ready to do exactly whatever he told them to do. All they needed was a work schedule written down and stamped with God’s approval and hand delivered to each of them that told them what they had to do and how to do it. They seemed to be confident they could deliver! They were willing and ready to get started!

Jesus told them God’s “work” for them was to believe that he was sent by God; believe that he, Jesus, was the source of the *food that endures for eternal life* and he would give them that “food.” And with that disclosure the crowd didn’t seem quite as sure about how far they were willing to accept what Jesus was saying. So they asked for hard evidence that would give them proof that he was who he claimed to be, that he was sent from God. Another *sign*, or miracle would be just fine, something like the sign that proved to their ancestors that Moses was God’s own man, when Moses was able to deliver manna from heaven to feed the masses.

Jesus corrected them, told them it was not Moses who delivered the manna, but God Almighty! And just as God had sent manna long ago and saved their ancestors in the wilderness who were starving, now, Jesus said, God was giving them *“the true bread*

from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

The crowd came alive at the prospect of “true bread” raining down from heaven, sent by God, that would feed them, nourish their lives! They spoke right up! *“Give us this bread always!”* And Jesus thundered back, *“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”* He said *he* was that bread that would satisfy the hunger in their lives forever! He was talking about feeding the spiritual hunger in their souls, satisfying that hunger within them *forever*. He was revealing to them that he was the source of an enduring food, much like the *living water* he told the Samaritan woman would quench one’s thirst *forever!*

Believe God has sent me, he said to that crowd looking for lunch, looking for a sign, a miracle, looking for whatever would meet the short-lived desires that propelled them through the day. The most astounding miracle of all was the one standing there before them in the person of Christ, the one *sent from heaven* to reveal God’s love for them and the whole world in ways they had never experienced nor even imagined possible.

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Belief is that glimpse of *God who loves the world* seen through the life of Christ. Belief is that understanding that God’s love for the world involves us—interacting with us. Belief is that internal realization that God *does love us!* And by the grace of God, that realization

comes to each and every one of us in God's own way, in God's own time.

We acknowledge God's desire to be a part of our lives every time we come to this Table of God's Grace and Mercy. It is here we embrace the revelation of God in Jesus Christ every time we break this bread *from heaven* and drink from this cup of *living water*. And together, dear friends, we proclaim and celebrate the presence of Christ among us, *trusting in God's eternal presence abiding within*, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is in this life together with Christ that our spiritual hunger is fed and our lives are made whole. Thanks be to God, *for forever*.
Amen!

"thanks be to God, for forever" John 6:24-35 080121 Mkh