**Tenth Sunday after Pentecost 01 August 2021**

JOHN 6:24-35

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 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. 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." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 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? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 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. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 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

Here is a list of ingredients:

* 3 tablespoons sugar plus 1/2 teaspoon sugar
* 2-1/4 cups warm water
* 1 tablespoon salt
* 6-1/2 cups flour
* 2 tablespoons oil
* 1/4 ounce active dry yeast

Raise your hand if you think you know what this ingredient list would make. If you were thinking bread - then you are correct! This is for two loaves of bread.

Not that many years ago, most families baked bread on an almost daily basis. I learned to bake bread and other baked goods as a child - this was more or less expected since my mother’s family had been bakers for a long time. *[Some of you might remember Oven’s Bakery on Mitton St. or the Oven’s Pride bakery at Sunrise. All part of my mother’s family!]*

Historical experts tell us that agriculture was developed around ten thousand years ago, earlier or later in some cultures . Agriculture is basically defined as the growing of grains. However, according to some recent discoveries, the making of bread from wild grains may be ten times older than agriculture. Nomadic herding animals may be the most ancient human activity - and before all of that humans were simply hunters and gatherers.

The development of settled agriculture, is what ultimately lead to the things that we associate with culture, writing, legal and political systems and ultimately religion. It is religion that brings with it a deeper understanding of humanity’s sense of the sacred and divine.

Around the world and throughout time, most cultures have some form of baked product that is their form of bread. Bread which has been called ‘the staff of life’, is very much the most important part of people’s daily diets.

The importance of bread is most evident in the ways we talk about bread, and that we use the word ‘bread’ to refer to other things that we consider important.

People sometimes refer to money as ‘bread’, as in ‘he makes a lot of bread’ meaning money and not someone’s baking output. Often it means all food required for our sustenance, such as in the Lord’s prayer when we pray for ‘our daily bread’.

This is of course in line with ancient peoples who also used the concept of bread to mean many things. In many religions bread is used in a religious context. That of course includes the bread that we use in the celebration of the Eucharist.

We, of course have this language in scripture. The word bread occurs 492 times in the bible. There are also other references to the process of making bread.

However, one of the things that we need to keep in mind when we are reading scripture is that very often words for common things or ideas are used to explain spiritual ideas. Or to put it in another way, concrete words and ideas are used to explain abstract spiritual ideas.

So with that thought we examine today’s reading taken from St. John’s Gospel. This passage is absolutely packed with ‘bread related imagery’

“you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”

or

“He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”

or

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

Finally 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."

This idea is of course also found in Mathew “man may not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”.

It is clear in the John passage that ‘bread’ is being talked about in two different senses. First there is food, and second there is ‘that which is required for a spiritual existence’. Food for the belly vs food for the soul.

Jesus is accusing his followers of worrying only about their stomachs, “eating their fill of loaves”, however, in the final analysis is that their spiritual life is of the utmost importance.

Now a sidetone is that this is all from the Gospel of John, which is the most spiritual of the four Gospels. Most of the other three Gospel’s for the most part more or less just ‘report the story’, but John’s Gospel is communicating to us ‘who Jesus is’. The technical word for this is ‘Christology’ , the nature and mission of Jesus the Christ.

John’s Gospel uses a number of literary devices, including irony and plays on words. And here we see the interplay between different meanings when referring to ‘bread’.

Jesus is making a profound pronouncement, one of the great ‘I am’ statements of John’s Gospel, “I am the bread of life.” But his followers don’t quite ‘get it.’

Many times we are presented with situations, where Jesus is attempting to explain a deep spiritual truth to his followers and they don’t get it. When we read those passages, we have to sit back, pause and take a moment and ask ourselves, if it had been us, would we have done anything different from the response of the followers and disciples? In some ways, in those passages, the followers are really stand ins for us.

We might then ask, do we ‘get it’ - are each and every one of us absolutely convinced that what we require to be sustained in our spiritual life is one thing only and that is a relationship with Jesus. - That is the ‘recipe’ for spiritual health.

It is Jesus who is at the centre of our spiritual life, he is our connection to the Divine, creator, redeemer, sustainer. Yes Jesus is the bread of life.

As the collect for today says,

Renew your people with your heavenly grace,

and in all our weakness

sustain us by your true and living bread,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen.