



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea

***The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida***

“The Bread of Life – again?”

12th Sunday after Pentecost – August 11, 2024

John 6:35, 41-51

A Homily by
The Reverend Jo Popham

Today we hear another story about Jesus being the bread of life. Are we tired of hearing about bread? Jim and I are! Most priests get to this summer season of “bread” and are weary of hearing about it again. Why do we hear about bread again? My friends, we **MUST** take to heart the good news that we hear in the Gospel. Jesus **IS** the bread of life. And obviously we must need to hear that message again.

My brother Eddie is an evangelist. He would not claim this honor, but I do for him. He was ordained to bring people to Christ by his baptism and confirmation, and he is very effective. He has brought many to know God and to believe in Jesus who said I am the bread of life. Through the love of Jesus and belief in the promise of eternal life Eddie takes the message to others in prisons, on the streets, at the hunting camp, and in his own neighborhood. He attends St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Monroe, Louisiana. He has brought many to a new life in Christ through his leadership in Cursillo and the prison ministry aptly called Kairos. He told his good friend about Jesus and the holy food that Jesus offers, food that is the bread of life, the bread of life that came down from heaven. And he told this friend that he could find this bread of life at his church, St. Thomas. His friend declined the invitation. Eddie asked him again. Again his invitation was deflected. So Eddie gave it a little time, and he asked him again. He told his friend about the love of God that he himself knows through Jesus and how Jesus feeds us with the bread of life. Finally, his friend gave in and came to St. Thomas. After several years of worshipping there, his friend became a leader in the church, serving as Senior Warden. I would not call Eddie a patient man, but he is persistent. As a lay rector of Kairos he knows there is a right time, an opportune moment to make the decision to follow Jesus, and Eddie knows that he is not in control of the timing for someone else to accept Christ's embrace.

Today we heard the 3rd in a series of “I am he bread of life” discourses. By now we can recite the theme of John’s Gospel. This third installment of the bread of life theme deals with origins. John deals with Jesus’s origins from the very first chapter in the very first verse. “In the beginning was the Word.” Jesus’s lineage began with God, God’s very self, before the world was created, Jesus was, and remains still with God. Then Jesus said: “I am the bread of life. I am the bread that came down from heaven. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” Well, the Jews knew Jesus, or thought they did. He was the son of Joseph the carpenter. His parents were Mary and Joseph. They had watched him grow up in Nazareth. Surely he was meant to become a tradesman, a carpenter like his father. How then could Jesus have come down from heaven? How then could Jesus claim to be “the bread that came down from heaven.”

The Jewish authorities could not understand how Jesus might be a special messenger from God. God had used many messengers, but his greatest message came through a Galilean carpenter.¹ The Jews disregarded it because it came from Jesus. Our NRSV Bible (the New Revised Standard Version) reads that the Jews “complained” about Jesus’s claims. In my world as a mother I would say that they were whining. And Jesus said “Don’t whine!. I am telling you the truth of who I am!” The NIV (the New International Version) says that the Jews grumbled. The King James Version reads murmured. They expressed their discontent. The Jews’ hymnbook, and Jesus’s hymnbook too, was the book of Psalms. Psalms generally come in two forms: laments or praise. Laments often express regret or mourning people’s actions. Murmuring is something else; there is no sorrow or regret in murmuring, only complaining, whining, finding fault with someone or something. Did the Jews grasp who Jesus was? No. They had heard him, but had they listened? And if they listened, did they listen with criticism or resentment or indifference or superiority? Did they listen only for a moment when they themselves could take the chance to speak? How could they truly understand the message if they rejected the messenger? The Jews learned about God from Torah and from the Prophets. But Jesus said the way for people to know God was through himself. Jesus had

come down from heaven, from God, to make God visible – to make God’s will known – to all humankind – ALL humankind. But the Jews discounted who he was, and therefore his message, based on Jesus’s origins. Their own measure of credibility was misplaced because they could not hear or truly listen to God’s message, because of their own measure of the Messenger.

Where we come from matters. Our origins make sense of our present. They form our identity. Now we might think, if I only could go back and experience this or that again, or change this thing or that one.² We can lament our past, we can even murmur and complain about things of the past, but that will not change it.³ The point is that Jesus IS the bread of life that came down from heaven, and that reality can recreate us, our future, our present, and even our perception of the past, because, like Jesus, we are children of God too. We certainly cannot change the past, or rewrite the truth, but we can see our past – our origins – through the lens of our present and our promised future.⁴ We cannot repeat this enough. Jesus, the bread of life, has claimed us as children of God. We are recreated people by the bread of life. And as recreated people Jesus can and has and will continue to affect our future and our present. When we take Christ into ourselves – when we partake of the bread of life – we have the promise of life. This is good news that MUST be shared. God sent Jesus to all humankind, but we also have free will to respond or not respond to God’s initiative. We must remember that God gave everyone to Jesus – everyone –even if some reject him. And rejection might be just for this present time, not for all of God’s time. We need to remember that Jesus came to be the living bread for all humankind – whether they know it or not. He did not come to us based on our origins, or just to those we think of as the chosen. Jesus came to feed all people, to show God’s love and reveal God’s will to EVERYONE.

Something happened recently at the funeral of a dearly loved parishioner that exemplifies the healing transforming power of God’s love, however we name God. The large family had gathered to be with their wife, mother, and grandmother before she died and after as well. They were Episcopalians, of course, and Roman Catholics, and

Buddists, and Jews, and NONES (those who claim no religion). When they were invited to the Lord's table to take communion, they ALL came up. And I cried, I think because for the first time in my life, I saw the power of the living bread that came down from heaven that unites us all one to another. I felt the strong love of God that began to heal this beautiful diverse family who were mourning. And I enjoyed the reality displayed for all to see that indeed the one who was no longer with them in the flesh was already at the heavenly banquet with God.

Let us all remember that we have good food to offer the world. We are Eucharistic people, and we are meant to share the life-giving food that we enjoy with EVERYONE. Jesus continues to give himself as living bread again and again and again. Let us all be like my brother Eddie, and share this life-giving good food – the life-giving good news – with all those that God has given to Jesus – and that would be ALL people. And if we need to repeat the message over and over, let us do so with confidence, knowing that Jesus IS the bread of life.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

¹ William Barclay's Study Bible on John Chapter 6:
<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/john-6.html>

² At the same time, where we come from may be where we never want to return. But never say never. Sometimes we spend our lives – or too much of our lives – too much of the present – trying to correct the past or make up for our past. We might try to live today in a way to right mistakes – real or perceived missteps or perceived failures. But we can't repair the past. We cannot.

³ The Dalai Lama spoke at the American Embassy in New Delhi, India. He said “we cannot change the past, but we can reshape the future. Young people have the opportunity to create a happier, better future.” I do not imply that this truism from the most famous Tibetan Monk who has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize is the answer to our problems or the problems of the world. But this message of hope should be listened to, should be heard, no matter its origin. And I surely do not want to distill today's reading to something akin to Chinese fortune cookie wisdom. We all have probably had the cookie fortune speak of taking “advantage of an upcoming opportunity” or “reform or reclaim the past and reshape it.”

⁴ Brief interpretation credit to Karoline Lewis, Associate professor of Peaching at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, MN <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3664>.