

[1] August 11, 2024

Sermon Title: "Who forgot the bread?"

Scripture: John 6:35, 41-51 (Matt: 16:5; Mark 8:14)

Theme: Use of Mt 16:5 question to look at the leadership team's calling.

[2] On one of their excursions with Jesus across the Sea of Galilee, Jesus discovered that the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread with them on the journey. Mark actually tells us that they had one loaf of bread, but, generally speaking, had forgotten the bread. This forgetting to bring the bread occurred at the same time that Jesus was trying to warn them about the yeast of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herod, a yeast that grows inside the soul as pride and betrayal. Jesus wanted them to make the poetic connection between "yeast" and "teachings," to understand that there is danger in listening to misinformation and false teachings, danger in planting the seeds of greed and envy. Jesus wanted them to get rid of their boasting, get rid of the old yeast inside of them and take on a new yeast (unleavened) of sincerity and honesty, shedding malice (*kakia*) and hatred (*ponéria*), and embracing truth. (1 Cor. 5:6) So, the disciples should always remember to bring their own bread (byob), or better yet, bring their own yeast (byoy) to make their own bread. The disciples had watched Jesus multiply the bread from five loaves on one occasion and seven loaves on another occasion, multiplying fishes from a few fish. Perhaps they could let down their safety guard on having something ready at hand to eat, if Jesus could perform this miracle regularly. They might have reasoned, so what if we forget the bread occasionally, Jesus will be there and can handle the situation; Jesus has our back.

Can you imagine with me the conversations on that day? "Ok, who forgot to bring the bread? John, was it you? Simon? Bartholomew? Andrew? No, it wasn't my turn to bring it. I brought it last time we came here. I had to stay up by myself baking it in the oven. ... Did you leave it in the oven, James? What about the salt plates for the oven? Were they exhausted? Do we need to get new ones? The fuel for the oven burns more easily when the fuel is salted. James, do I have to do all the remembering around here? Peter, you're always bringing day old bread. You know the Master wants us to only bring fresh, "daily" bread. Wait a minute, did someone eat the bread before we got here? The bread was not for eating, but for sharing. Who stole the bread? Who forgot the bread?"

[3] I have a medallion that I used to wear when I was a teenager that shows a chef in front of a brick oven shoveling into the oven a loaf of bread. The words on the medallion are in French; they reference a famous restaurant called "The Old Mill in Nestou," but they are universal to anyone who knows about bread in the French culture: "Health Be To You!" "May you have good health! May you eat well today" The psalmist writes:

"God, you cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart." (Psalm 104:14-15).

Not only does bread strengthen our individual hearts, but also our collective hearts. There is nothing like sharing fresh baked bread straight out of the oven? "Is not this the fasting I desire,

God says to Isaiah (58:6), to set the oppressed free, to share your bread with the hungry ... to care for the least of these?

[4] You might remember that the widow of Zarephath from Sidon shared her meal and oil with Elijah, baking cakes of bread from the meal and oil that she had in short supply. (1 Kings 17:7-16). She and her son were down to almost nothing and were settled upon the possibility that they might die soon when their meal and oil ran out. But, Elijah insured that this did not happen. Her meal and oil were replenished daily by God as a reward for helping the prophet. In later years, the Gospel writers called this “a prophet’s reward.” (Matt 10:41). This reward is a blessing received from sharing bread.

In living near the desert, vegetation would only last a few months because of the intense dryness but also because people would gather dry vegetation to start their ovens, then scrape away the ashes and put in the bread. In other words, God clothes the grass on the prairie so that we can start our ovens and bake our bread. Another aspect of this is that people in the ancient Mediterranean world, believed that they could see because light proceeded outward from their eyes like flashlights, and that light or darkness proceeded from their hearts to the outside. In asking who forgot the bread, Jesus is suggesting that his disciples need to fix the concerns of their hearts.

One of the special camps I attended at Disciples Center Tawakoni in Kansas was for men and boys, and this included foster boys as well as family. During this camp, we navigated the ropes course at the camp, made leather pouches for each one to keep, participated in a bible study designed and developed by our regional minister, Ken Marston [Odyssey – Christ-centered living to strengthen the soul], specifically for men and boys, and topped off the camp by making bread from scratch and baking it together. It was quite an experience for the heart, and the fresh homemade bread was amazing! Thanks to our camp staff, we had all the ingredients we needed. I wish we had more of these types of events.

[5] But, back to the scriptural story about the disciples forgetting the bread. Jesus wanted them to understand that they had misunderstood his message if they are worried about having forgotten the bread. He wants them to look beyond “breadness” to living Bread. The import of the statement “Man does not live by bread alone,” is that God’s gift of bread is intended to do more than fill the stomachs or feed the hungry; it is intended to nourish the inner person and make truly “genuine” authentic life possible. Although sometimes we forget, we do hunger for more than bread, we hunger for a Word from God that will make our bread holy bread. When we connect the Word of God with the bread of our broken existence, food is more than food, praying is more than praying and mission is more than mission. If we receive the life-giving bread of Jesus Christ, our worship becomes more than ritual, our worship begins in a hopeful faith, is supported by an engaging faith, and ends with a deepened faith.

On this Leadership Sunday, I would lift up to you who are going through leadership retreat today, that leadership is more just remembering to bring the bread, or even bringing the recipe

for making the bread. It's about strengthening the heart of the congregation; it's about "remembering" the Body of Christ, "re-living" the Gospel Story sharing the Living Bread.

At Kansas Leadership Center in Wichita, we engaged in the process of knowing ourselves, and then, deliberately finding out what others say about us (both leaders and followers). We learned how to listen to unheard voices, and cross factional-lines. Living Bread feeds both ways, self and others; Living Bread unites ... the two, the many, becoming one Loaf, One Cup.

"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf." (1 Cor. 10:17). And, just as "there is one body and one Spirit, just so you were called to one hope (Eph. 4:4). In the lyrics of Neil Diamond's "Solitary Man," we are not in a lonely place where "love is a small word," but it seems to me, that in Christ Jesus, love can never be a small word. Love must be a big word, a huge word, a gigantic word. Not just self-love, but also other-love and God-love. This is the task of leadership: that we make Love the biggest word possible in our community.

[6] Worship that includes the Bread of Life always transforms us in our participation in it. Some bibles contain a section known as the Pseude Epigrapha. One of these works, written after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, is attributed to Baruch, whom you may remember as Jeremiah's scribe. In a book entitled 2nd Baruch, this scribe is portrayed as a prophet in his own right, as providing a vision of the future apocalypse, the future end of the world. Baruch is noteworthy in that he uses Jeremiah's style, which is a mix of prayer, lamentation, and vision. In his book, Baruch describes a revelation that he receives from God which ends with the coming of the Messiah. What is interesting about this revelation, related to our message this morning, is Baruch's understanding of the coming of manna at the end of the world. 2 Baruch 29:8 "Supplies of manna will fall on the earth. Then shall they eat of the manna, for it will be the end of time."

This image of manna, as being provided by God at the end of time, is one that we may assume is in the back of the mind of the disciples of Jesus also. They were expecting "bread from heaven," the repeating of what happened when God provided for their needs during the Exodus and during the journey through the desert of Sinai, only repeated forever in the end of days. They probably even identified the manna as the gift of Moses instead of the gift of God from heaven. But, Jesus wants to extend their thinking beyond this world; no, Moses did not give you the bread. Moses prayed for the bread, Moses asked God for the bread, for something to feed the people. But, Moses did not provide the manna. God provided the manna. It was not like any bread that they had ever eaten. God wanted them to know that this food, this manna, was from heaven; it was not an earthly bread, but a heavenly bread. And, this is the type of food, the type of bread, that Jesus gives us as the Living Bread. Jesus gives us his very self, not just food, but a way of living beyond survival, a way of living beyond fear or anger or hate, a way of living beyond brokenness. Jesus gives us himself in all the dimensions we can see, and the eternal dimensions we cannot see. We do not just receive a filling of our stomachs with food, but we receive a fulfilling of our spirits with inspiration and hope. You may remember that food that fills our stomachs perishes quickly, but food that fulfills our souls lasts eternally. Spiritual hunger develops out of physical hunger; it does not take its place. Feeding the hungry is paramount in the feeding of our own souls and the souls of others. As Jesus once told us, we are to leave our

gifts at the altar and go and do what we must to be reconciled with others and inside ourselves, sharing our bread with a hungry world, and then come back and offer our gift. God is patient; God can wait and will wait for us to accomplish the pre-conditions for communing.

But, in another sense, the people who received manna in the wilderness were not allowed to store it beyond the day of its giving; the manna was, by necessity, a daily gift, a morning gift. Though it seems strange to us today, the Bread of Heaven must be renewed daily, weekly, monthly, or it too will fail to satisfy us. Our soul-food is not one answer for eternity, but a series of questions that we gradually refine until we find a larger answer. It is not that heavenly bread has a flaw, but more the case that we cannot own the heavenly bread for even one minute beyond our consumption of it. As our needs change; the bread we need changes; the heavenly bread fulfills in different ways. As one biblical scholar has put it, “God is God and not superman.” God has no Achilles’ heel, no Kryptonite dependency. The all-seeing God responds beyond our myopic needs to a larger need outside of ourselves.

Do we today have a list of questions that we can put to God? Why? What? How? Who? When? Do the answers make a difference in our lives? As we used to say in government work, is there a “need to know?” Or are the answers only a “nice to know.” Is there something to be said for NOT knowing the answers we seek so desperately? In the Lord’s Supper, our larger religious tradition tells us that God reveals God’s self in the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine or juice? Some traditions call it the sacrament of all sacraments, in that it has the power to transform us, inside and out. Believing becomes knowing; faith becomes action. Can we find the Spirit of God in the ordinary elements of bread and juice, recognizing their extraordinary nature, in that Spirit, to reveal all we are and hope to be?

We are not alone in the breaking of the bread. We eat together an extraordinary meal in the presence of an extraordinary Savior! We do so as community, as a world community, remembering the Body of Christ as it extends to the farthest corners of the inhabited world. A community of communities. A bridge to eternal fellowship in the extraordinary love of Jesus Christ. I invite you today, not just to eat, but to feast on the beauty of this Truth, given to us today, to be and share the Good News that we find in remembering our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.