

First Trinity Lutheran Church  
August 4, 2018  
John 6:24-35

## **I Smell Bread**

Today we read in Exodus that the Israelites are traveling through the desert, hungry, tired, and cranky. It's been six weeks since God led them out slavery, rescued them from Pharaoh, but as the old saying goes, "What have you done for me lately?" and the people are cranky and ready to complain. Luckily this all happened thousands of years ago and God's people have progressed so much that none of us can relate to complaining! It is funny how the more things change the more they stay the same. Indeed, people haven't changed much since the time of Moses: we are still hungry, still dissatisfied, and still ready to complain. This is part of what it means to be in bondage to sin, to be curved in on ourselves, we often trapped in a place of dissatisfaction, when nothing is quite up to our standards. We still cannot see how we will make it or how God will get us through.

In this story the Lord calls Moses saying, "I have heard the complaints of the Israelites, so tell them this from me". If you and I with our short tempers were God, what would we say to our children? "Deal with it! Too bad for you! Quit your crying, or I'll give you something to cry about!" But instead the Lord is slow to anger and generous, saying, "Tell the Israelites at twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have you fill of bread."

So out the Israelites went, to stuff themselves: quail, Thanksgiving turkeys, every night! And in the morning a dew on the grass, that left behind something flaky and powdery—“What the heck is this,” in Hebrew, “*manna* literally means “What is it?” Manna—the bread the Lord has given you to eat. God is always at work to provide for us, God is at work right now providing for you, more generously than we imagine or deserve, not holding our sins and complaints against us but pouring out, spilling out all he has for us. We don’t always need more, but rather need better eyes to see what he’s already giving you day after day after day.

Moving on to the Gospel reading today just after Jesus feeds 5,000 people, that we read last week, these same people are looking for Jesus, but they are confused, lost, and hungry. What better describes our world today, or this culture we are a part of: confused, lost, hungry, searching for something worth having, starving for truth and justice and righteousness in a world that numbs us to suffering and confuses us with lies and preys upon the most vulnerable, leaving us scared and hungry and empty!

Jesus says to those who are looking for him, “I know why you’re here, you’re here to fill your bellies again because you saw my ability to multiply loaves and fishes, are you here for the all-you-can-eat buffet? He tells them don’t work for food that rots, for food that turns to nothing, but work for the food that lasts, the food that endures to eternal life!” So at this moment I ask. Why are you here?

What are you looking for? For the food banquet that has no end? For having things ‘your way, right away,’ right now? For that which perishes, for the things we stuff ourselves with and entertain ourselves with and distract ourselves with-- which all in the end die and return to dust? Or are you looking for that which lasts forever, for the food that endures to eternal life? Are you looking for Christ himself, for living food, that eternal food that will fill you up so that you’ll never be hungry again?

The people around Jesus know how this world works: at any restaurant the table is only set for those who have money to pay for it. So they ask Jesus what must we do to get this bread that endures, what can we bring, what can we pay to get this? And so Jesus responds to them and to you and me and all who think they can earn or deserve something from God, by saying this, “This is the work of God. You want to do God’s work? God wants to bring you to faith and God wants you to believe in his Son. That’s what God wants from us: faith! And that’s what God is at work giving you, the ability to trust in him, to see that God has given us everything in his Son. All the rest service, outreach, ministry, good works-- comes from this: faith. This true bread that comes down for you has a name, it’s a person, Jesus Christ. This is what God is giving, this is what he rains down for you, this is what God gives you this morning, Jesus Christ who is everything you need, who will provide all you need exactly when you need it, he who taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Years ago there was this TV show MASH about a mobile medical unit in the Korean War. One of the doctors Major Charles Winchester becomes obsessed with death after nearly being killed by a sniper. In an effort to discover an answer to the question “Is there life after death?” he goes to the front lines as a medic to see death face-to-face. As one soldier lies dying, Winchester asks the soldier what he sees and in his dying breath the soldier says to Winchester “I smell bread.” This answer is enough to change Winchester’s perspective. I think this illustrates that our hope in the face of death, is not an answer but an experience in Jesus as the “Bread of Life”

Bread “I AM the bread of life,” Jesus says “whoever comes to me will never be hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” “For the bread of God comes down from heaven and gives life-- eternal life--to you, to me, and to all the world!” Amen