

Sunday, August 7, 2016

Exodus 16:11-18

John 6:25-51

I Am the Bread of Life

In January of this year Oprah Winfrey as spokesperson for Weight Watchers shouted, "I love bread; bread and butter; and I like to eat it every day." Yet when one is watching what they eat, often bread is one of first things that is off the menu. But Oprah states, "I now just manage it. I don't deny myself. I enjoy it. I love bread." Bread is a considered a staple food that is a basic food item. It is one of the items that is put on one's grocery list each week or if there are allergies associated with basic bread, an alternative is found. A person can survive a long time on only bread and water because bread fills one up until they are satisfied and they will not grow hungry soon.

But bread is something more than a food item, it is synonymous for food in general. Bread has a special appeal. How difficult it is to ignore the smell of bread breaking and imagining a favourite topping put on it to enjoy. The smell of fresh bread often brings up special memories and often even causes one's mouth to water. Bread of some form is a staple to most traditions and the act of breaking bread together is when a meal is shared with another person.

Bread also plays an integral role in Judeo Christian history. Our reading from Exodus 16 reminds us of the story as Moses is leading for former slaves through the desert. As they journey they grumble to Aaron and Moses because they have no food. They said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted but you (Moses and Aaron) have brought the Israelites into the desert to starve to death. "It is then that God speaks to Moses and tells him the meal plan. At twilight the people will eat meat and in the morning they will be filled with bread. Quail came each evening and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor." This was the bread from heaven because God had rained it down. But God also put a condition on this manna. It would appear each day but not on the Sabbath. The people would then gather a double portion only for that day and the Sabbath. Every other day they were to gather only what they could eat. If they took too much, it would spoil but they were to just gather what they needed for each day. They eventually learned this when they tried to keep too much. For forty years as they wandered, they had quail and manna.

Every day quail would be available for them to have meat. These were small game birds large enough for the meal that would be eaten that night. They would not need to refrigerate the leftovers and preserving it was not needed as they were on the move each day and each night more quail was available. How many ways were they able to cook the quail? We are not sure, all we know is that they ate quail and manna and lived.

As we read the stories of Jesus there were times when he just wanted to be alone or only with the disciples. However, the crowds kept following him and were so amazed by his teaching. One day the crowd was huge and they were in need of food. There was no place to buy bread or not enough money to buy it any way. There was young boy with five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus feeds the crowd with these and has food to spare. After all is completed Jesus again tries to get away from the crowds but they follow. He even asks them if they are looking for a 'free meal' or were they really interested in the promised One. He tells them, "Don't labour for food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give to you."

The people were so amazed at his miracles the food he provided for them to eat, that they did not look to the miracle maker. They were missing the point that the Messiah was right in front of them. They wanted another sign about this Messiah- how would they recognize the one sent from God. Jesus finally tells them who he is by saying, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

What could Jesus really mean by saying this? Jesus is like bread= essential for life not physical life but eternal life. He is trying to get his listeners away from the food that they consume to understanding Jesus as the Spiritual food they need to sustain them throughout their earthly and eternal life. Physical bread like the manna perishes but Jesus the bread of life is for eternity.

In the gospel of John Jesus makes other claims to God. This is the first of I AM statements in the Gospel of John and it stresses the connection between God and Jesus as One. I AM is the name God calls Godself to Moses. I am is the covenant name of God "Yahweh". And I am tells the believers that God/ Jesus is self-sufficient presence of God. Jesus also calls himself- "I am the light of the world, the gate; the good shepherd; resurrection and the life; the way, truth and the life and the vine." All these identity Jesus with God—I Am.

Jesus introduces himself as "the bread of life". By bread of life, Jesus means that he is, by what he says, how he acts, and in fact, who he is, the Word of God. Jesus is the Word spoken by God. Jesus reveals God to us in the most complete way possible because Jesus is God come from heaven to be with us. And through this teaching that Jesus is the bread of life—we should understand that he should be essential in our life and that we need to accept him into our hearts, minds and let His Spirit guide us so that we may be transformed and changed

But Jesus does not stop with "I am the bread of life." He continues and then invites those listening to place their faith in him as the Messiah and Son of God. Jesus says to those hearing his words, "Come and believe". Come to Jesus by choosing to follow him. Believe in Jesus by placing your faith in Him for He is the Son of God and He will do what He says he will do. But the people were unsure of what he meant. He tells them that if they are hungry and thirst for righteousness they shall be satisfied. When Jesus says those who come to Him will never hunger and those who believe in him will never thirst, he is saying through Him alone,

that they will be made righteous in the sight of God. But they need to discern what this means for them and so do we.

Jesus is the only one who can satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness. He is the only one who can enable us to be reconciled with God. For as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21 "God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

What is this righteousness of God? It is because of Jesus' death on the cross that He took the sins of all people upon Himself and redeemed us. So when Jesus calls us to him we are to place our faith in him, to trust him so that we are forgiven in faith.

This is the challenge for us today. We are to believe in Jesus- listen, follow and deepen our relationship with him so that we might become like him. We will also be filled with the spiritual food that gives us everlasting life. The food that Jesus only can give and which will transform each of us and will change our world. But it is up to each of us to hear Jesus' invitation to come and share with him. To understand that He is the bread of life and we should love him. We should experience his love each day by sharing it with others and receiving his love from others in return. Jesus is the bread of life and through these words we come to know that He is essential for our everlasting life.

When was the last time you ate bread and really enjoyed it? No matter what kind of bread you eat, it is good. Jesus said. I am the bread of life. Are we willing to love this bread for all of eternity? Or are we still waiting for the messiah to show us more signs? Jesus is Gods Son and the Great I am is with us now as the Spirit moves amongst us. Let us hear his calling out to us. Let us hear the invitation and respond as we pray together:

God you have given to us Jesus the bread of life- essential food for the journey we call life. Help us to discern what you want us to be and become through our faith in you. Help us we pray as we seek Christ Jesus as our food and drink which will forever nurture us. Speak to our hearts we pray. Amen.