

Sunday, October 9, 2022 Pentecost 18 ***"Give thanks for the Bread of Heaven"***

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 John 6:25-35

Happy Thanksgiving Everyone! But what does this mean exactly? From our Old Testament reading in Deuteronomy, "giving thanks" was a celebration in honour of God's gifts of first harvest in the Promised Land. God called the people to gather in His name and present a portion of what they had gleaned from the harvest season and offer it to God in Thanks for He was the One who made this possible. They were also to recite the history of the people who moved from slavery, wandering in the desert and then claiming the Promised Land. They were to do this to remember from where their ancestors came and the journey of life which was now theirs to live in the land of opportunity and blessing. They were called to offer God thanks.

In Canada, we experience harvest season earlier than in the US and for this reason it is important to observe this secular day away from routine as a time to gather family and friends together, to share in a meal that reflects the culture, tastes and is of many different traditions. Many people will indulge in turkey, potatoes, gravy, a lot of vegetables and pumpkin pie. For others it is ham and sweet breads; and still others the menu choice for this time is whatever is in the refrigerator or not. We must also realize that more families are receiving food support than just a year ago and what we call food equity is becoming an international concern. This will be a part of our focus next week, which is World Food Day. But today our focus is on who and what we should be thankful for because Jesus raised this question of asking for more help without doing the works of God.

Our story from John 6 focuses on Jesus' disappearance for a time apart from the crowd. The crowd is now seeking him out for help and support because they see in Him something they desire. They might have been a part of the crowd of 5000+ who had a free lunch after Jesus' miracle of food was shared and wanted to hear him speak again. But all we know is that Jesus was able to get away even for a short time. Until the crowd searched for him.

During the time Jesus lived on Earth, the people with whom he lived and associated with experienced difficulties. Life was hard and work was endless. People were ill and carried heavy burdens of poverty. Taxes were high and yet they received little support in return. But

here was Jesus performing miracles, healing people of physical ailments and when he spoke he taught about finding hope not in earthly things but in what God offered to them. He offered something they had not received before==a means to think beyond their here and now and to look to the future.

Jesus stated, "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." The people did not understand what he meant so asked, 'what must we do to perform the works of God?'

Jesus clearly states: believe in him whom he has sent. That is, himself, God's Son as the One sent by God to bring life to all. Those listening knew the story of how God sustained their ancestors in the desert as they wandered to the Promised Land. Jesus describes the importance of the manna that the people received from God. Those white flakes of food called manna appeared each morning to sustain the people as they journeyed to the Promised Land. This was bread of heaven for that time and that generation. But Jesus continues by saying that he is the bread of life for them and consequently for us as well. HE is the bread of life sent by God and it is He that gives life to the world. Upon hearing this the people ask politely and with respect, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus then states, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hunger and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." For Jesus' purpose is so that all who see the Son and believe in him will have eternal life. And this is when many people put their faith and trust in Him.

Jesus following grew larger but at times he needed to be alone. People still searched for him as they learned that he could supply more than food to eat. They realized that what they needed was something which would offer hope out of the disparity they experienced in their lives. Jesus offered eternal life for it is through him that one may experience God's love.

When we gather around tables to eat out of abundance this Thanksgiving, just what do you do? Is there a moment for sharing thanks and love? Is there a time to reflect upon God's blessings? Or is silence the norm because emotions or concerns might arise due to illnesses of the mind or heart? Just what does everyone bring to the table that cannot be eaten or seen? OR is there fear to talk about the matters Jesus shared with his disciples.

Jesus struggled in his life. He knew what his life's purpose was but his heart ached for those disciple friends who he knew needed his guidance. He struggled about what God wanted him to do with his life. He struggled knowing that enemies would approach him, test him and eventually sentence him to death. But he also looked after his needs—he walked and prayed and he listened to people. His teachings were based upon the needs of the people he observed. His life's purpose was to be the One by which all people who turn to in times of celebration and crises, when crowds were needed or solitude was preferred. Jesus knew that what he offered to them the most was hope. This is easy to say to truly have hope one needs to be resilient. When one has strong resilience mental health struggles are prevented. This resilience enables strength to endure and people are able to tackle and do everyday tasks and responsibilities.

Everyone has mental health struggles and by building resilience we can prevent getting stuck in the depths of those struggles. You have probably heard many messages about mental health in these last weeks and the growing need for support workers in this field. Mental Health Awareness week is October 2-8 and the International day for Mental Health is October 10. But how do we connect the Bread of Heaven- Jesus to what we need to do for self care? And how do we offer thanks to God when life seems to be filled with more struggles, disasters, losses, uncertainties, and the need to or desire to escape?

Jesus built resilience in order to strengthen hope in himself and others. As we reflect on Jesus' teaching of relying on him to sustain us as the bread of heaven how are we looking to do this for ourselves? Mental health strategies include such things as 1) staying connected to others 2) knowing yourself and limitations 3) recognizing boundaries and when to say yes and no 4) meditation- slowing thoughts and focusing on God 5) self-care- love others and yourself 6) have fun- rejoice and be glad 7) rest- learning from our rest or Sabbath time. And if you would like to pursue this further, please speak to me or email me. I know that mental health matters and taking these strategies and implementing them for life makes a difference in how we live and love others.

We know this, because Jesus lived his life for others but he also cared for himself as he ministered to people. He didn't heal everyone; he taught where he was welcomed and

challenged his listeners. And most of all, he taught us how to give thanks to God as well. Each time we share in the sacrament of Holy Communion, we follow his example. We give thanks to God by sharing in the Great Thanksgiving prayer; we break the bread, fill the cup and we ask God to bless it. It is then given to others in and out of love. This is thanksgiving. This is giving thanks. And it is where we find hope.

As you pass the plates filled with God's abundant foods, remember where hope may be found. Remember to pray for those who cannot feast and give thanks with grateful hearts for Jesus is the bread of heaven who came to Earth for you. The question needing to be asked is are you willing to give thanks for what He has done for you? In Christ alone our hope is found. Through this church family we reach out and care about you for who you are in this moment. Let us rejoice in this for we need to give thanks for God's blessings, for giving us hope and for the One which came down from heaven for our sake- Jesus the Christ. Let us remember this as we thank God and offer our praise this day.

LET US PRAY

God we give thanks that you love and care for us. We offer to you our lives and the abilities of our hands so that others may know you and have hope through Jesus our Saviour.

We give thanks. O God and in this silence we offer our thanks to you. SILENCE Amen.