

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost, August 13, 2006, Liturgical Year “B”

**St. Bartholomew’s Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins - Curate

Scripture: John 6:37-51

***“The Bread of Life”***

I can remember the smell of bread baking in the oven that had been carefully kneaded, rolled, and given time to rise. There is just something about that smell, and then slicing into that loaf, and the aroma that comes out of that first cut. The steam would rise from it. The best part of it all was taking that slice and breaking it, and taking a bite. You can just about taste it can’t you? The thought of bread from your past remains with you even now, doesn’t it?

When I read about bread in the Bible, I can’t help but instantly think of that smell, and the loaf, and the taste. How about you? Can you smell it? Just the thought of it leads me to thinking about the trip that Marilyn, John, Theresa and I made to Israel with Shores Ministries back in 1999, called “Let the Children Come.” (It was a life changing trip that was specially crafted for children and adults. We all learned so much!) We were sitting in a Bedouin tent, no let me correct that, **we were reclining in a Bedouin tent**, watching a man take a thick clump of dough, and pound it, flatten it, and then spread it out on what might best be described as an “upside down WOK,” over an open fire of coals. The finished product was more like a pancake or fajita. It was much closer to the bread of Jesus’ day than the bread of my aromatic memories, but not quite right on the mark.

We, in the western world, are used to bread being just a part of the meal, almost a side dish – that we usually smother with butter. What I discovered is that bread was the chief food of Israel, made with barley flour mixed with broad beans, lentils, and other grains. The Hebrew word “lechem” means bread, and has an Arabic equivalent meaning “meat.” **Bethlehem or Bet-Lechem** gets its name – **House of Bread** from this word. The lechem was baked on a griddle, or in clay ovens, and made into flat loaves about ½ an inch thick. They can be as large as 20 inches round. Usually a hole was left in the middle to make it easier to pull apart for eating. **Bread was NEVER cut.** Other foods like meat or fish were wrapped in bread and eaten. It was without a doubt a major part of every meal – a dietary staple.

**Do you think it is a coincidence that the “Bread of Life” was born in a town called “house of bread?” I think not – I think God was trying to get the peoples attention and make His intent very, very clear.**

**Today’s Gospel begins right after some very important events:**

Right after the feeding of the FIVE THOUSAND from 5 small barley loaves, and SMALL loaves at that, right after Jesus’ walking on the water, the people were still looking for Jesus to give them a sign. Jesus had given them their fill of bread and fish – and they were still looking for more. Then, Jesus tells these people that He is the bread of life. And they were still asking for signs.

The Galileans of Jesus time had to work for their bread, so when they found a miraculous source of food -- **this was Great News!** I’ll bet they thought they had it made. They might have even been thinking that Jesus was going to provide them with a gravy train of Manna, just like Moses did – every day.

I am sure that those that were present at the feeding of the 5,000 remembered Jesus blessing the bread, looking to heaven, and were reminded of the words of Psalm 78:23-25 “*Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the rain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.*”

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Jesus wanted to set the record straight – first of all, everybody was getting excited about the food, while they missed the miracle of the loaves and fishes. They also missed the walking on the water. They missed the calming of the winds and the sea, and they missed the miracle of time and space “as He and the disciples got there immediately!”

Jesus did not come to fill their stomachs, **but to fill their lives** --- with the very essence of God. Instead the crowd was focusing on the physical, rather than the spiritual.

How often are we like the crowd, too busy focusing on stuff, rather than having the eyes and ears to hear and see God’s presence in our lives? These people were more interested in grumbling and complaining. Like their ancestors in the wilderness, these Jews murmured.

Their thinking was logical:

- They knew Jesus’ parents – so how could He possibly be from heaven?
- They had no clue of His true origin and full nature.
- They said He was the son of Joseph, (Yeshua bar Yoseph) but they did not know of the Virgin Birth, - how could they?
- Jesus had come down from heaven because **He is the Logos, the living Word of God. He is Emmanuel – God with us!**

Jesus challenges the people, telling them not to work for food that perishes, but for food that that endures forever – for eternal life – *which the Son of Man can give to you*. Jesus tells us that this food can be obtained by work – believing in him, but is a gift at the same time. The Son of Man gives of His own life, and by doing so, makes it possible for us to share in that life.

Jesus couldn’t make it any more plain --- **BELIEVE in Him** – the one whom the Father has sent – and that is the work that God requires.

There is a line in the movie –The Santa Clause – that really fits here, and in our lives --- “Seeing is believing, but believing is seeing!” How often did Jesus say that we need ears to hear and eyes to see? Here we have eye witnesses to miracle after miracle, and yet they just didn’t see it.

They’re still not getting it, SO they ask Jesus for a sign, to help them believe.

UH, excuse me, but what part of feeding over 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish didn’t they get? And then the Apostles leave in the only boat, Jesus stays behind – more boats come – Jesus isn’t around, they leave – they arrive in Capernaum – Jesus is already there.

Signs? They are looking for signs? These people couldn’t hit water if they fell out of a boat!

In the original Greek, the word used is **σημειον (semayon)** which means sign or miracle, and to the Apostle John, the author of today’s Gospel, signs and miracles are interchangeable. **It is pretty evident that these people have short and selective memories!**

One thing **they haven’t forgotten** about is the food. Their grumbling is very reminiscent of the Israelites in the wilderness who complained about not having enough to eat – and that they would rather be eating leeks and onions by the Nile! They want Jesus to instead be Moses and just produce food for them. They bring up the Manna in the desert issue – quoting to Jesus that their ancestors had bread from heaven to eat. And they were asking Jesus to do something even greater than Moses did, to prove that he was greater than Moses. After all, **not only had Moses brought their ancestors the Manna, but he ALSO freed them from the Egyptian rule. Now they saw someone who could fill their stomachs and who could also be the Messiah:** who would free them of the oppression of the Romans.

Jesus reminds them what the truth is; totally rejecting any thought whatsoever about drawing a comparison between Himself and Moses, or the manna and the true bread – which gives life to the world.

First of all – It wasn’t Moses who sent the manna, **but God the Father.**

The manna of the desert that the Israelites fed upon had to be **collected every morning**, before the sun melted it. If they stockpiled it for any other day than the Sabbath, it **bred worms and spoiled**. Manna was **food for the body**, and was a **gift** of God’s provision for those 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus is **God’s full provision** for people in their **WHOLE existence**. Jesus repeatedly tells us that He had come down from heaven. If we believe in Jesus, as the Son of the Living God, we are drawn out of the wilderness of darkness and sin, and fed with **the food of eternal life**.

Just like the Samaritan Woman at the well in John 4, asking for more when Jesus offered her the living water of eternal life, the crowd says “*give us this bread - always.*”

In answer to this request, Jesus drives his point home by saying: “**I am the bread of life.**” While preparing to bring this message to you, I studied this text in the original New Testament Greek, and the translation of “*ἐγώ εἰμι*”: for **I AM** jumped out at me. I looked back and found the same words, “*ἐγώ εἰμι*”: in the Ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament- the Septuagint – the same words were used by God in Exodus 3:14, proclaiming his holy name to Moses -- “**I am**” “*ἐγώ εἰμι.*”

This is one of seven times that Jesus used these same words describing His divinity. He has told us, **I am** the Good Shepherd, **I am** the true Vine, **I am** the gate, **I am** the way, the truth and the life, **I am** the resurrection and the life, **I am** the light of the world – and by proclaiming “**I am the bread of life, Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty**” and then again saying “***I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.***” Jesus reveals to us that He alone is the key to our spiritual birth and our spiritual survival! My brothers and sisters – Jesus couldn’t make it any plainer – or any clearer. And it breaks my heart that even today there are some who still do not get it – or refuse to.

**I would ask you to listen to this comparison of Manna in the desert to Our Lord Jesus Christ:**

- (1) Manna came from heaven at night; Christ came from heaven when mankind was in darkness.
- (2) Manna fell on the dew; Christ came, born of the Holy Spirit of God.
- (3) Manna was not defiled by the earth; Christ was sinless, separate from sinners.
- (4) Manna was small, round, and white, suggesting Jesus’ humility, eternity, and purity.
- (5) Manna was sweet to the taste; Christ is sweet to those who trust in Him.
- (6) Manna had to be taken and eaten; Christ must be received and **fully accepted as Lord** by faith.
- (7) Manna came as a free gift; Christ is the free gift of Almighty God to the world.
- (8) There was sufficient manna for all; Jesus Christ is sufficient for all.
- (9) If you did not pick manna up, you walked on it; if you do not receive Christ, you reject Him and walk on Him (see Hebrews 10:26–31).
- (10) Manna was wilderness food; Christ is our food in this pilgrim journey to heaven.

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Jesus is telling the crowd and all humanity of a kind of bread that is far superior to the manna that was provided for wandering Israelites in the desert, and the crowd says it wants to receive this bread. Jesus then grants their request by revealing that He Himself is that bread. He speaks of the role of the divine call and the human response in people’s coming to faith, and challenges them to believe in Him, **if God is their God**. Jesus calls upon them to stop grumbling, for them to not repeat the pattern of their ancestors, but instead to respond in faith. In effect – Jesus is once again calling the world **to repent**.

Jesus says that based on their response they are judging themselves. Their rejection of him reveals their relationship with God, for “*no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*” (John 6:43). By putting it this way Jesus illustrates that **He and the believer have the very same origin, the Father**. The Father sent the Son and the Father draws the believer to Him. Jesus said “*all that the Father gives me will come to me*” (John 6:37). Well, now Jesus further supports that teaching from the point of view of his Father’s work in the believer.

- By repeating His promise to raise the believer *at the last day*, Jesus is claiming to be the very person, the one who fulfills the promises of resurrection in the age to come.
- And this future hope is combined with a fulfillment for today; for Jesus says that those who eat the bread of heaven will not die but will live forever

By believing in Him, reading and staying in His Word, repenting of our sins, having a personal relationship with Him, and as we are about to do in a few moments, exercising the awesome privilege of receiving His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, **we are partakers of that heavenly bread – the Bread of Life**.

Just as physical bread – must be eaten to sustain physical life, we need to invite Jesus Christ - our eternal bread - into our lives to give us spiritual life and sustain it. We receive spiritual life when **we come** to Jesus Christ – remember: **He will never force himself on us**. And so the decision belongs to each one of us... **Do you want to share eternal life with Jesus, or not?** I would ask you to think about your relationship with Jesus, and to pray about your decision. It begins with repentance and belief in Him – and is therefore bathed in forgiveness. Jesus alone is the ONE, true, living bread that alone can heal our lives. **There is – and can be no other!**