

Exodus 16: 11-18

¹¹The Lord spoke to Moses and said, ¹²“I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

¹⁶This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’ ¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. ¹⁸But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.

John 6:24-35

²⁴So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" ²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³²Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Bread of Heaven

August 8, 2018

The wonderful writer Max Lucado tells about a time his wife Denalyn called as he was driving home. “Can you stop at the grocery store,” she asked, “and pick up some bread?”

“Of course,” he said.

“Do I need to tell you where to find it?” she asked.

“Are you kidding?” Max asked. “I was born with a bread-aisle tracking system.”

Like a knowing wife, she said, “Just stay focused, Max.”

“She was nervous,” says Lucado. “Rightly so. I am the Exxon Valdez of grocery shopping. My mom once sent me to buy butter and milk; I bought buttermilk. I mistook a tube of hair cream for toothpaste . . . I am a charter

member of the Clueless Husband Shopping Squad. I can relate to the fellow who came home from the grocery store with one carton of eggs, two sacks of flour, three boxes of cake mix, four sacks of sugar and five cans of cake frosting. His wife looked at the sacks of groceries and lamented, ‘I never should have numbered the list.’”

Knowing that his wife was counting on him to carry out this simple task, Lucado parked the car at the market and entered the door. On his way to the bread aisle, he spotted his favorite cereal, so he picked up a box, which made him wonder if they needed milk. He found a gallon in the dairy section. The cold milk stirred images of one of God’s great gifts to humanity: Oreo cookies. As Lucado put it, “The heavenly banquet will consist of tables and tables of Oreo cookies and milk. We will spend eternity dipping and slurping our way through . . .” He doesn’t finish the thought, but you get the idea.

He grabbed a pack of Oreos, which happened to occupy the same half of the store as barbecue potato chips. What a wonderful world this is, he thought, cookies and barbecue chips under the same roof! On the way to the checkout counter, he spotted some ice cream. Within a few minutes, he’d filled the basket with every essential item for a happy and fulfilled life. He checked out and drove home.

His wife looked at his purchases, then at him. Can you guess her question? It’s an obvious one, isn’t it? “Where’s the bread?”

He went back to the grocery store. He forgot the one thing he went to get. The one essential product. He forgot the bread.”

This story, while amusing, also reminds me that there are many things in our lives and American culture that distract us and tempt us. From Oreos to iPhones, fast cars and cool clothes, to beauty products and sexy bodies, to wealth and fame and power, we are constantly being seduced by things that bring us fleeting pleasure and tap into our deep hunger to be filled and to be safe. To be whole and complete. We give thanks to God of course for those things, and we sort of expect God to keep giving us those things don’t we? But there is a deep hunger in our souls that cannot be filled with just these material things.

Mother Teresa once said, *“Suffering is increasing in the world today. People are hungry for something more beautiful, for something greater than people round about can give. There is a great hunger for God in the world today. Everywhere there is much suffering, but there is also great hunger for God and love for each other.”*

Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and a Holocaust survivor became convinced that the basic human hunger or the deepest drive within us is our deep longing for meaning and purpose. We want our lives to matter. And in Psalm 42 the psalmist sings, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

It brings to mind that moment in the book of Acts where the apostle Paul spoke to the people of Athens. He noticed what religious people they were because of the many altars and objects of worship they had. He was particularly interested in the altar inscribed to an unknown god and he used that to begin a wonderful dialog about Jesus and God the Father. He tells it like this, “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’

I certainly believe that we are compelled to search for God and perhaps grope for him and hopefully we find him. It may take a lifetime for some of us, but I think we are hard-wired to seek for God. And yet we seem to look for God everywhere but where he is. And so I am asking myself about what fills me. What am I seeking in the world, in my life? What are you seeking, and do you think you will be filled when you get it? I used to think being a great performer and singer would do it. I used to think that money and a nice car and a beautiful home would do it. I used to believe that if I won a million dollars in the lottery I could be satisfied for life. But the truth is none of these things bring the fullness that Jesus talks about. Ask anyone who's won the lottery if it really changed their lives for the better. Or ask anyone on their death bed if they wished they had spent more time at the office. To all our pleas for physical bread Jesus says, "Stop working for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which he will give you."

This part of the story is about spiritual bread and I guess, you have to come to the end of your barley bread, your physical bread, to understand your deep need for God. Maybe it's that kind of hunger that finally gets your attention. And I find as I stand alongside them in his presence, that I have to at last admit, that I am powerless to solve the needs of the world. I am powerless to meet my own deep needs. And acknowledge once and for all that Jesus is the Bread of the world, the Son of God, the Savior of us all, and I must surrender to him, and I cry out along with them, "Give me this bread always!" "Jesus, I can't get around you here." As the disciples finally confess at the end of this chapter, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." You are the Bread of Heaven.

You are My All in All

*You are my strength when I am weak,
You are the treasure that I seek,
You are my all in all
Seeking you as a precious Jewel,
Lord to give up I'd be a fool,
You are my all in all.*

Jesus lamb of God worthy is your name, Jesus Lamb of God worthy is your name.

*Taking my sin, my cross, my shame,
Rising again I bless your name,
You are my all in all.
When I fall down you lift me up,
When I am dry you fill my cup,
You are my all in all.*

And perhaps when we surrender to the Lord, then there is bread, real bread; warm...out of the oven bread for everyone because we will have been transformed into bread makers for the world.

This story reminds me of a moment 3 years ago when at Grassy Creek Church, we had our Backpack and School supplies dinner at the Wagon Master community in Spruce Pine. It was our third year and the families had come to expect us to be there with our many gifts and lots of hotdogs. Something we will do again this week. It was wonderful to see children and families that we had been serving for a couple of years. The kids were growing up and I guess we had become a staple in their lives.

And that evening, the people and children came again to get bread (hotdogs) and to be filled (with backpacks) and there was community, and food, and friendship. But that year I remembered we invited some folks from the Gideon's to come and hand out bibles. Something we hadn't done before. And it just struck me as a

profound parallel to our story this morning, because the families came and ate and got school supplies, which are all pretty fleeting in the grand scheme of things, sort of like bread. But as they were leaving they took bibles with them. All the Spanish ones went first, along with the large print editions. And I couldn't help but think that they came for the stuff, (the metaphorical bread) but they left with the Word. And I use Word with a capital letter, because they took Jesus with them. They took what John has been saying from the beginning of his gospel that Jesus is the Word, the Logos, who was with God from the beginning. Perhaps that will be the thing that ultimately fills them. I pray that this is true. That will be up to the Holy Spirit, not me.

Jesus says, He is the Bread of Life. That relationship with him is the one thing in this world that will truly satisfy and fill your needs. This is not about food or houses or cars or material possessions. It is about a relationship where you, like those who followed him that day, cry out, "Give us this bread always!" They recognize that Jesus is the Messiah and for you and me, in whatever mysterious way that happens, it must be the same. Are you still looking for love in all the wrong places, as that old song goes? Or are coming to the One who will fill you completely and set you on a journey you will never forget?

This morning we come to this table of bread and cup. We remember the many times so long ago where bread was shared and the spirit flowed, whether on a hillside or an upper room. And we come with all those others who sought him with hunger both physical and spiritual. Where all were satisfied, and all were made whole. This morning we too come to this table and be filled with all that Jesus has for us. We can surrender our own desires to be filled by the world, our own doubts about who Jesus is, and we can put our lives in his hands trusting in his mercy and grace. Jesus said, "The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." And so, I invite you this morning to come and receive this life and wholeness in Jesus' name. Let us pray.

Prayers of the People

Faithful God, It is easy for us to go through the motions of spirituality. We want to say the "right" prayers, and think that we have found the magical key to make holiness appear in our lives. But we are empty, Lord. We hunger and thirst for something that will sustain us through all the times of our lives. We chase after things that will disappoint and hurt and look past the very thing that will heal and cleanse our lives. Christ is your Bread of Life, the Manna from Heaven, which was and is sent to feed and sustain us in all the wildernesses through which we travel. Help us to stop running after the glitz and glitter, the easy fix; help us to look truly for the one who will quench our thirst and nourish our souls.

But it isn't easy following Jesus and sometimes his words to us are difficult to understand and even more difficult to follow, but we desire to do so more than anything we have ever desired. Encourage us on our way as we lay down our hopes in the promises of the world and lean on the promises that you have given us. Help us to be faithful and courageous, patient and kind, bearing all things in our love for you and your children as well as all creation.

We lift up to you all the people of the world. Those who are caught in violence and war, those who've lost homes and jobs, those who are afraid and alone, who are grieving the loss of loved ones. We pray for those devastated by severe weather both rain and fire who have suffered loss of life and property. We remember those who are in new circumstances and don't know where to find a friend, those who are depressed and feeling hopeless and isolated. Surround them all with your healing presence Holy Father and remind them again in small and powerful ways that nothing can separate them from your love, not in this life or the life to come.

We have many needs here in our own community and we lift to you now the many people and situations which lay heavily on our hearts today that need your healing touch. Help us to remember that we stand continually in need of your healing mercy and that we stand together as one body in Christ. Hear now our prayers both spoken and silent for those we hold close this day.

Merciful God, as we receive the wondrous gift of bread and wine, may we truly be reminded that Christ nurtures and feeds us with his own life. And when we have been nourished, may we go from this place in renewed commitment to serve you, O God, with our very lives. For we offer these prayers in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray saying,.....our father