

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

July 25, 2021

2 Kings 4:42-44, Psalm 145: 10-19, Ephesians 3: 14-21, John 6: 1-21

Food for Thought

Like Oprah Winfrey, I love bread. I love it by itself. I love it warm from the oven with butter. Lately, I have taken to eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for breakfast. They are delicious when the bread is white and soft. Years ago, I followed a food plan that required giving up flour and sugar. It was easy to give up the sugar and so hard to give up the flour. You can keep your cakes and pies. A nice piece of bread is good enough for me.

Truth be told, while I am aware of how bread nourishes my body, I rarely think about bread as spiritual food. Today's Gospel invites a reflection on the gift of bread, starting with the story we just heard. Jesus, aware of the many people who came to listen to him speak, asks Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip is, of course, at a loss. He can only see this request in concrete terms. There are so many thousands of people and so few resources to feed them. We cannot blame Philip for thinking this is an impossible task.

Many of us are like Philip. When we think about all the hungry people in the world, we are at a loss to figure out how to feed everyone. Especially when we are confronted with a lack of water, stifling heat, arid land, and

other environmental factors that make food production a challenge in so many parts of the world. It is a particularly vexing problem when we also consider how much food is wasted and taken to landfills in countries with richer resources. Food production, its process, its costs, and its distribution should be a big part of any discussion about climate change. I wonder what we might be able to do if we redesigned our food systems with the intent to feed all who need to be fed and not waste any of it.

I also wonder what it would be like if we were more respectful about food. Whenever I had an opportunity to share a meal with my observant Jewish siblings, I was always moved by their blessing of the bread. It is called the hamotzi, and it blesses God for enabling bread to come forth from the earth. According to the *My Jewish Learning* website (www.myjewishlearning.com), the hamotzi is said any time that bread is consumed and usually with a special ceremony at Shabbat (Sabbath) dinner. This is the blessing, “Blessed are you, Lord our God ruler of the universe who brings forth bread from the earth.” The prayer recognizes that there is no bread without God, for there is no human who can make a seed grow. Yes, we can plant the seed, water it, nourish it, and do our best to create conditions for growth, yet any gardener can tell you that one can only hope that the seed will grow at the end of the day. You might disagree with me, and that is fine. However, my belief that all life comes into being

through the grace of God has long been a part of my faith, and I plan to keep on believing that truth.

As Jesus did in today's lesson, we give thanks before we begin communal meals here at church. However, I do not remember a time; I am not saying it does not happen; I do not remember when we also said a prayer of thanksgiving after eating (except, of course, during the Holy Eucharist). Maybe some of you already know about this commandment in Deuteronomy about giving thanks after a meal. It is in Deuteronomy 8:10, and it says that after we have eaten and we are full, we should bless God for the good land we are given. Gratitude for the food we are about to eat **and** for the food we have just eaten. Giving thanks before and after a meal is a beautiful spiritual practice that parallels our sharing of the Eucharist when we gather for communion.

Over the years, I have heard many sermons about the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. I heard some say that members of the listening public added to the five loaves and two fishes, which is why everyone was satisfied. I heard others say that we may never understand how Jesus did it. We just need to know that he did. Continuing to reflect on this Gospel passage is essential. Embedded in this lesson are questions and considerations that can lead us to think about what it means to have enough and creating sustainable processes for feeding our bodies and our

spirits. Exploring the messages in this Gospel passage might include thinking about what we can do to feed the people in our community and worldwide. What do we have to offer individually and collectively to see that everyone is nourished? How can we support farmworkers and others who help provide food for our table? How might we gather up the fragments of food we produce and consume so that nothing is wasted? What might we be able to accomplish if we composted at home and church? And, how, with the actions we take, will we revitalize our spiritual experiences of gratitude and faith?

In closing, I want to share this prayer for breaking bread with you that comes from The Prayerist website (prayerist.com)

*Lord, as we take this bread,
We remember that You are the bread of life.
You feed our souls, you nourish our hearts, and You give us
sustenance to run the race before us.*

*As we break the bread, we feel the softness of Your love for
us.
We smell the fragrance of the grace You release afresh each
day.
We thank you with all our hearts for the great price You paid
when You were crucified on the cross for us.*

*Yet just as the yeast has caused this bread to rise, You rose
again, triumphant over death as Lord of Lords and King of
Kings forever, and our beloved Savior.*

Thank you, Lord.

Amen.