

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

Psalm 130

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

Most of us can and do equate being fed with being loved. We can remember favorite foods from childhood that were given to us by our mothers or grandmothers and sometimes our fathers or grandfathers or aunts or uncles. Being fed and being loved just seem to go together. We can remember certain foods that remind us of the ones who prepared them for us. And we came to love the way grandmother's chocolate cake tasted and we knew that no one else could make it just the way she did. In my memory, the food that most conjures up feelings of being loved is my mother's vegetable soup. She was a child of the Great Depression, so she was very skillful at making things last, and balancing a budget, and feeding all of us on practically nothing. Among the staples at our dinner table was my mother's vegetable soup. I used to watch her make it and when I got older, I used to help her make it. It was one of my favorites. I even have her recipe for vegetable soup so that I can make it for my own family. And when I make it I remember my mother. What I make is good, but something is missing. When my mother made the vegetable soup, she put a little of herself into each pot. My mother was part of the soup she made and that was the part that I can't replicate. When I make the soup now, I always think of her, but when I taste it, I'm aware that she isn't there. She's not in the soup that I make. As good as it is, it's also a reminder that she is absent. She's not here with us any more. Keep this metaphor in mind as we continue exploring Jesus' metaphor about being the bread of life.

We are at the halfway mark in our five Sundays of hearing about Jesus as the bread of life. In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus tells his followers that he is the bread that came down from heaven. This announcement is met with some immediate complaints from the Jewish leaders and the crowds that are listening. They can identify Jesus as someone they know from Nazareth. How can he have 'come down from heaven'? They know Mary and Joseph, Jesus' parents. All of Jesus' references to his 'Father' are a puzzle to them. Isn't Joseph Jesus' father?

We know, of course, that Jesus is referring to God, his heavenly Father. And when he speaks of his Father, he is not talking about Joseph. He's talking about God. Jesus tells them that no one can come to him unless drawn by the Father who sent him. If we translate the Greek word that is here translated as 'drawn', we will discover that it is more accurately translated as 'dragged.' In order to come to Jesus, we must be dragged there by the Father. On Sunday mornings,

sometimes it feels like we've been dragged. We can relate to that!! This Greek word is also the same word used to describe what happens to fish when they are caught in a net and hauled into a boat. They are 'netted' and 'dragged' onto the boat. Lucky and blessed are those who have been 'netted' and 'dragged' into Jesus' sphere. Our faith in Jesus and our fascination with Jesus is not something that we generated. It's not an intellectual decision that we made by weighing facts. It is a gift to us from God. And it is sustained within us by God. We remember that while Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, Jesus withstood the temptation to turn a stone into bread and his retort to Satan was that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word from the mouth of God. And here in this Gospel lesson, Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life. And he goes even further with the metaphor by saying that he is the living bread that came down from heaven.

While we are wading through the metaphors, let's think of another one that describes the reality of Jesus and our relationship with him. That is the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ in the world. We are members of that body. We've been dragged into the body of Christ that is the church. In the New Testament lesson that we heard this morning, we listen to St. Paul's instruction to the church at Ephesus. He's giving them advice about how to get along and how to function together as the body of Christ. He's telling them not to harbor anger, but to forgive one another...to be compassionate and charitable with one another. He's telling them to stop the quarreling and to live in love with one another. Congregations that are mired in conflict don't function well...for themselves or for the world they are to serve and bear witness to. In Paul's letter we are charged with practicing all that Jesus taught us about how to live with one another, how to get along with one another, how to value and respect one another so that we can be the well-functioning body of Christ in the world. Jesus told his followers, the early church, that the world will know that we are followers of Christ by the way we love one another. Working things out among us and between us is the way we create a healthy congregation...one that not only takes care of itself, but one that offers respite and witness to the world in which we live. We are then in a position to offer food to those who come to us...the food that is Jesus himself. The community in which we live is hungry...and not just for literal bread, but for the living bread that is Jesus himself...the bread that feeds the soul longing to be drawn in, accepted, valued, and loved. When our own house is in order, this we can do for those who come to us longing to be fed and filled.

Jesus told those listening to him that he is the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and he said that the bread that he will give for the life of the world is his flesh. This living bread that gives eternal life is not just for the chosen people of Israel. This bread is for the whole world. No exceptions. This bread is for all human

beings no matter where they are and no matter who they are. We are all eligible to be netted by God and dragged into the boat.

Today we are celebrating International Sunday at St. Paul's. When this idea first came up, I scanned the calendar to choose an appropriate date for this celebration. It occurred to me that doing it on the Second Sunday would provide us a chance to feed each other...literally...with special and much beloved and remembered dishes from our countries of origin at our Second Sunday Potluck Luncheon. I had not even glanced at the scripture readings for today...full of the metaphor of Jesus feeding the whole world. It was such a remarkable coincidence, that I have to believe it was a "God" thing. We have brought food that reminds us of being loved...like the memories I have of my mother's vegetable soup. And the mystery that cannot be fully explained about how my mother was present in the soup she made and how the ones you love are associated with and present in the dishes that you bring today to share with all of us. This phenomenon that we are all familiar with leads us to begin to wonder about Jesus' presence in the bread and the wine that we prepare in memory of him and that we consume during the Holy Eucharist. As we continue the next two weeks of hearing Jesus talk about being the living bread for all of us, we will explore that mystery a little more.

By God's grace and mercy and love, we have been dragged into the body of Christ that is the church. Through the love of Jesus who gave his life for us, our souls are nourished by his body and blood given, not just for us, but for the whole world.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.