

## Are You Hungry?

Proper 14, Year B – John 6:35, 41-51

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson August 12, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Bread is a pretty basic thing. If you were to travel around the world, you'd find that bread comes in a nearly limitless variety of types, flavors and styles. Depending on where you go, you'll find white bread or brown bread or black bread. You'll find huge loaves baked in mammoth ovens, cakes oil-fried in a pan, flat pitas or tortillas toasted on heated rocks. But of course, you don't really have to travel any farther than the Sureway or the Subway, for that matter, to check out bread in all sorts of grain, configuration, and flavor. You can find bread made out of corn, rye or more varieties of wheat than you shake a stick at. You can find bread that's made with grain that's been finely ground, kernels that have been merely cracked, or even seeds that have been baked in whole. Depending on the season, you can even find bread made from pumpkins, potatoes or zucchini. You can find round bread, flat bread, thin bread, twisted bread. You can find little rolls and you can find great big, giant loaves. You can find it sliced for sandwiches, cubed and toasted for salads, and pre-crushed – in case you want to cover something *else* in bread. You can find bread that's been flavored and topped with nearly everything imaginable: onions, garlic, little seeds; sugar, cinnamon, icing; nuts, fruits, cheese. I think that if it can be sliced, diced or grated, spread, sprinkled or sifted, it can be and *has* been baked on *top* of, wrapped *around*, or baked *into* a loaf of bread.

Whatever its form or flavor, though, bread is still a pretty *basic* thing. When you come right down to it, bread is a little flour, a little water, some work and a fair amount of heat. We all know about bread. At its most basic, at its simplest level, bread is important to us. Bread is life sustaining. It's part of our culture. It's part of our lives. And it's been that way since before we humans have recorded our history. It's bread at this basic, elemental level that Jesus is talking about when he calls himself the "bread sent down from heaven." It's at this basic, elemental level that Jesus says that without eating the bread that is his own body, there is no life in us. It's at this basic, elemental level that Jesus says that bread is the basis of our relationship with the Father.

Bread is a pretty basic thing. But it's not always what we crave, it's not always what we go after, is it? I don't know about you, but my own carbohydrate intake is seldom boosted into overload by simple, basic bread. No... the stuff I go after in admittedly overabundant quantity is the stuff that is the least nutritious: I want crackers, and I want cookies, and I want pie and cake. I want junk food, not the stuff I know is best for me. And what's more, I *know* I'm not the only one in that particular boat – I've *seen* some of you eat!

The *real* bad news, though, is that we aren't a whole lot better about our spiritual food. Jesus says, "Here's bread," and we respond, "I'd rather have cookies." "Here's bread that will sustain you," he says and we argue, "But I want cupcakes." "Here's bread from heaven that gives life itself." "But can't I have mine with cheese, or raisins, or sesame seeds, or, or, or..." Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life," and we distractedly respond, "Aren't *angels* fascinating." "I am the bread that will sustain you," he says and we argue, "But couldn't we discuss the soteriological and the eschatological implications of double post-lapsarian predestinationalism." "I am the bread from heaven that gives life itself." "But first we need to settle which version of the Prayer Book to use, or whether we should bless this, that or the other thing."

Come on, already! Bread is a pretty basic thing. And so is our relationship to Christ. I'm not saying that the Christian life has to be bland or tasteless. Already with some degree of regularity, I have stood at this desk and tried to point out that the Christian life is a joyful experience, filled with cookies and cupcakes and cheese and raisins and a thousand delightful surprises around every corner, and I will continue to preach that Good News as long as God gives me the breath and *you* give me the honor of standing here. But the life-giving main course, the very foundation for the entire *feast* that is the Christian

life, is the bread that the Father has sent from heaven, nothing more and nothing less than the body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Without feeding on that bread, the Gospel says, there is *no* life in us. Without feeding on that bread, we are dead – in no position to accept the abundance, the bounty, the *extravagance* with which our Father longs to feed us.

There have been times in my life when I have gotten a little behind in remembering just how basic and uncomplicated the bread of life really is. With the bussle and tussle of Church politics, with all the hub-bub of budget processes and staff interaction, with chasing this committee assignment, or that canon revision, or the other episcopal election, there have been times when other things, less basic things, have taken a more central role in my thoughts – and even in my prayers. But a few months back, when I was on my way home from lunch with a stranger and a short, kind-of-clandestine visit to a home I didn't know yet, I remembered again just how basic the truth really is. I closed my eyes as my dear chauffeur-wife took care of the road, and I remembered back to a long time ago, in the basement of Greenville United Missionary Church. I remembered Mrs. Cole playing the tinny, slightly out-of-tune piano as she led a handful of kindergardners in our Sunday School songs. I remembered singing at the top of my lungs, "Jesus loves me, this I know!" And I remembered why it is that I love being a Christian. I remembered why it is that I love the Church. I remembered – before either of us even knew it – why it is that I love being here with you: You see, setting everything else aside, bread is a pretty basic thing.

Are you hungry? Is your life full of things to do and people to see, but still you feel empty? Bread is a pretty basic thing.

Are you hungry? Do you need a ream of paper to count your blessings, but still you have an unmet yearning for meaning to it all? Bread is a pretty basic thing.

Are you hungry? On the outside do you appear to be filled and content, but inside you know there is just *something* missing? Bread is a pretty basic thing.

Are you hungry? Jesus said that he was the bread that brings life. He has prepared for each of us a banquet beyond compare. He has offered himself for me – and for *you*. Come to the table that he has prepared. Take the body of Christ, the bread from heaven, and eat. Feed on him in your heart. Feed on him by faith. Feed on him with thanksgiving. It's the only way to have and to *sustain* life in your soul. "Taste and see," the Psalmist once said, "that the Lord is *good*." Are you hungry? Bread is a pretty *basic* thing.