

11th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13)

August 4, 2024

Holy Family Episcopal Church Laurel Springs, NJ

2 Samuel 11: 26–12: 13

Psalm 51: 1-11

Ephesians 4: 1-16

John 6: 24-35

Psalm 51:11 “Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Right up front, I need to get this out of the way. I don't know if you are familiar with life verses, but this one, along with Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”, are two of mine. When I get frustrated or overwhelmed, or don't like my attitude or the way I react to something or someone, I remember either or both of these two verses to change my attitude about the situation. Now, just to be clear, all that was 100% me.

But now, I have a confession to make. The rest of this homily is not 100% me. Exhausting by the stress of having my mom in the hospital for nine days, I did not have the energy, time or focus that I usually like to put into preparing for when I preach. So, I went to a website sponsored by the Episcopal church called Sermons that Work, and found some inspiration there.

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

The story is told of a widower who had some raspberry bushes. The first summer after his wife died, a woman from his church asked if she could come over and pick raspberries. She knew he and his wife had lovingly cultivated the bushes from spindly young canes that came from the mail order catalog into thick healthy shrubs laden with fruit. She told him, “They have to be picked if you want them to keep producing, and I want to make you a pie. You don't get raspberry pie very often because it takes a whole lot of berries, and they are expensive. You have a whole bunch of berries just waiting to be made into a pie.” She picked the berries in the morning and returned in the afternoon with a pie- golden, homemade crust, red raspberry filling peeking through the golden-brown lattice crisscrossing the top, and it was still warm. “Enjoy a piece with me?”, he asked. “I can't eat an entire pie by myself.” He poured them each a glass of milk and cut two pieces of pie. It was marvelous – sweet, tart, gooey delicious fruit, flaky tender slightly salty crust. Perfect, especially with milk to wash it down. He thanked her for the pie.

Although the pie would have been a luxurious treat, he could have enjoyed piece by piece by himself, he got a better idea. He packed up the pie and went to visit a friend. "Here, have a piece of pie," he said. He sliced a piece and dished it onto one of the paper plates he had brought with him. "I won't stay long but I think you will enjoy this." They visited while each enjoyed a small piece of pie, enough to taste, but the richness of the sweet and tart and tender pie made a small piece just the right amount. He thought next of who might actually not just enjoy a piece of pie but need the pie. -Who might need some simple pleasure, some tangible reminder that unassuming things like berries and sugar flour and salt can be transformed into something that lets you actually taste summer in a mouthful.

-Who might be served by this undemanding manifestation of care and love in edible form. The pie was too good not to share.

So, he spent the rest of the day sharing the pie, slice by modest slice. He and those with whom he shared it found that even a small piece conveys the essence of it: sunshine, earth, abundance, creativity, compassion. He came to think of it as communion by pie. It was the kind of grace that conveyed the knowledge that he was part of a larger community, and that connection was part of what he hungered for. The pie did not cause the connection, of course. But the pie was the means for it, a way to say "I see you. I want you to join me in enjoyment, and nourishment, and a moment aside. Take off your work gloves, turn off your computer, set down your cell phone, your checkbook, or dish towel. Sit down for a moment and do nothing more than enjoy a piece of pie. "

Now pie is not bread. A good homemade pie says indulgence in a way that most common loaves of bread do not unless one is truly hungry, but a good homemade loaf can also remind us of humble elements transformed: flour, salt, yeast, maybe some egg to glaze the crust. The tangible and instantaneous connection with foundational processes of life: sun ripening grain, earth and rain feeding growth, human labor and creativity transforming raw materials into life-sustaining nourishment. Attention to the ingredients connects us to a web of labor and laborers whose efforts make food possible. We may even catch a glimpse of generations past whose ingenuity and fortitude laid the foundation for the bread before us. We could go all the way back to ancient times, but we don't have to in order to show the preciousness and perseverance of people dependent upon bread for their daily sustenance. Immigrants packed their trunks with wheat seeds when they journeyed to the great plains of North America. Refugees sewed seeds into the hems of their skirts and their children's shirts for the voyage, so the new life they longed for would be sustainable in a new land. They knew that even with a bit of bread, they could be nourished. They knew they could sustain life by planting, tending, harvesting, milling, mixing, kneading, shaping, baking, taking, giving thanks, breaking, sharing.

We meet Jesus in today's gospel just after he had fed the multitudes. They had had the pleasure of eating enough. We know that people have pushed away from the table that Jesus set for them in the wilderness, feeling sated and satisfied because according to the story, there were even leftovers. They ate until they were satisfied. They had enough.

Funny thing about enough. Just what is enough? The people Jesus had fed wanted a guarantee that they would always have enough. Jesus' provision of plentiful bread seem to them something they wanted more of, so they pursued him. They thought that if they could just have him, they could have bread- limitless, wonderful, unending bread. Enough. Jesus fed hungry people. He knew people needed to eat. He told his followers to feed people real, physical, tangible, nutritious food. But he also promised that he himself would be enough. He didn't want to be just a provider of physical bread. He wants to be our bread, our sustenance, our nourishment, our daily strength, our source of satisfaction. Jesus is bread, but he wants to fill the hunger of our hearts, and not just our stomachs. He wants to fill the annoying, aching emptiness that we try to fill with lesser things, to satisfy the longing for the boredom that we use substances of all sorts to quiet, to put it in grasping, fretting, worrying about having enough of anything that will in the end possess us, rather than allowing ourselves to fall into the hands of the one for whom we were made. Jesus is daily sustenance. He is bread to be savored, gathered around. Bread to inspire Thanksgiving, to remind us of the wonder of life, to strengthen us. We can contemplate him thoughtfully, chewing, slowly, pondering, but we will gain more if we come to him as hungry beggars; open to whatever he places in our stretch hands. He was taken, blessed, and broken. He is to be shared. The sharing of his life invites us to exercise to creativity of an artisan bread, baker, and the compassion of a mother selling seeds into the closing of her children so that they will always have sustenance for the journey. Jesus said "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.

Amen