

Bread and life surprise

*Sermon preached by Dr. Kathy Bozzuti-Jones, Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministries,
at the nine o'clock service, August 9, 2009: The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Based on John 6:35, 41-51.

“**T**he people began to complain about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’” Amen.

We human beings are never happy. We are not happy with our lives, and it does not take a huge leap to realize that we are not happy with God either. A great portion of spiritual history shows human beings constantly complaining and murmuring against God. We are not happy with God. If God comes too close, we feel claustrophobic; if God stays too far, we feel abandoned. If God works a miracle, we say, that’s just nature. If God does nothing, we say God is not great. We begin our week with these words, “Blessed be God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And blessed be his kingdom now and forever.” Blessed, now and forever, these are the words with which we begin our Eucharist, the words with which we begin our spiritual week; however, most of us forget these words when we leave here and experience the daily grind of life. When things get tough, when bad things happen, or when we meet the mysteries of life, we forget that God should be blessed now and forever. We forget that we should rejoice in the Lord always. The people of God are one bunch of unhappy people.

The story is told of a Jewish rich man who went to the temple every day, but he always fell asleep. Never heard anything, until one day, he heard a voice that said, “Bake me twelve loaves and set them before me.” He was so convinced that this was God’s voice that he went and obeyed. He brought the bread to the temple and left them there. About the same time, the caretaker of the temple had been praying desperately to God and lo and behold he walked into the temple and found bread. The rich man continued to bake bread, thinking God loved his bread, and the caretaker continued to find the bread, thinking that God was providing bread from heaven for him. One day the rabbi spent the entire day in the temple and noticed the action of both men. He was so moved he spent another day in the temple to observe them. He called them together one day and explained to them

what had been happening. Well, the rich man was not happy. He was mad to discover that God did not like bread and had not been eating his bread. The caretaker was also very unhappy, because all this time he was thinking that God had been providing for him. “Don’t be unhappy,” the rabbi told them, “God has been using you both to carry out his word. You have been a miracle of God and for each other...”

In our gospel today, we meet a very unhappy religious crowd. By the way, one definition of unhappiness is blindness. We cannot see other possibilities. We are unhappy when we cannot see new possibilities. We are unhappy when we cannot believe that God comes to us in the simple things and people of life.

The crowds become unhappy when Jesus tells them that he is the bread of life. Typically, Jesus does not allow us to become unhappy about one thing, but instead he rubs it in. I am the bread of life. Eat my flesh. If you don’t eat my flesh, you cannot have life in you. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and now they are dead.

But Jesus teaches an important point. Following God and finding life in God is not about happiness, it is about knowing that we are blessed. By being blessed, we live from a place where we can say, “I am too blessed to be stressed.” By being blessed, rather than being happy, we can continue to do what is right and continue to receive what is right.

What else could Jesus be but the bread from heaven? What else do you do with bread, but eat it? Does our unhappiness spring from a deep-down realization that God is calling us to participate in this mystery? When will we accept that we are called to not only bake the bread from heaven, but to be the bread from heaven. You see we are called to eat the bread from heaven and to share this bread from heaven.

There are two ways in which Jesus invites us to find grace, truth and blessing in all this God talk.

One way to participate in this bread talk of Jesus is to live fully knowing that God speaks and does

the most outlandish things. God does things from heaven on earth. God does the reign of God on earth. Henri Nouwen writes, "Living with Jesus is a great adventure of love. When you admit Jesus to your heart nothing is predictable, but everything is possible." Can you embrace the fact that life in God, this bread from heaven, offers nothing predictable, but there is a whole new set of possibilities?

Another way to participate in this bread talk of Jesus is to live fully knowing that God is calling us to do outlandish things. We are the bread from heaven. We are the food that this world needs. We are the presence of God when we let go of our desire to be happy all the time, to have the answers all the time. We are the presence of God at our best when we accept that we cannot control God, cannot control life, we cannot even control ourselves. All we are called to do is to do our best and participate in the very life of God.

St. Theresa puts it this way: "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours, yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the earth, yours are the feet by which He is to go about doing good and yours are the hands by which He is to bless us now."

What? We are the body of Christ? Come on! God must be able to do better than this! Sorry. "I

am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

John, with his symbolic literary style, invites us to have our imaginations stirred about how Jesus, Bread of Life, is a revelation of God. Take the scandalous language of eating bread that is living flesh, for example. If that doesn't surprise you, it should. It certainly surprised those who heard Jesus insist that this was the way to the Father. John says, in effect, let your imaginations begin to expand until they can hold your persistent spiritual hunger—until you can see "life itself." Begin to see God present everywhere in the material world. Jesus, the incarnation of God. You and me, incarnations of God, charged with revealing God in our loving actions.

Don't get too happy: the bread for the life of the world that you will give is your flesh.

May we be blessed with a huge appetite for the Living bread from heaven. May we be the living bread. May we commit to living in ways that others might be fed, others might receive bread. May God open our eyes to accept that we are sons and daughters of God.

Amen.

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