

“Will never be hungry again”

- No thank you.
 - Truth is that I enjoy food way too much for this
 - I have already told many of you of my plans next week after church
 - The family and I are hitting the road immediately after church on our way to the gulf coast
 - It is the traditional August family vacation prior to the school year beginning- I imagine many of you remember or are planning it too
 - We will stop over in Memphis, and why, you ask, are we going out of our way to Memphis instead of a more direct route?
 - Because my absolute, favorite, all time restaurant is in Memphis TN
 - And frankly, this restaurant is worth two extra hours in the car and a hotel night- it is that good
 - It is called Flight, like the flights of wine you might order, except they serve flights of food
 - And if we are lucky, and the traffic into Memphis is not terrible after that bridge over the Mississippi river cracked, we will be there by 830p
 - Now I say this because frankly I am so excited about visiting this restaurant again- it's been over a year
 - I have threatened, and thankfully Katy is more level headed than I, but I have threatened to catch a plane and fly to Memphis just to eat there
 - Never be hungry again? I really hope Jesus is talking about something else other than food
 - And he is, of course, and in the best way, the Gospel of John weaves together our body and our soul
 - John is using something we all know intimately, that is our physical body, and pointing to some deeper truths of our souls
 - And as I enjoy doing in sermons, we are going to start a bit with our first reading hearing about the Israelites in the wilderness
- Israel has left Egypt and has witnessed miracle after miracle at this point
 - How many signs do people need? the answer is: always one more
 - They saw the plagues come at the word of Moses
 - The sea part and reveal dry ground, and then close in defense
 - They followed a cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night
 - God turned bitter water into drinkable, life sustaining water

- And God led them to Elim where there were 12 springs and seventy palm trees- a true oasis for this crowd of refugees, this people of God
- They leave, and set out through the wilderness and before they are 2 months out of Egypt, they start to run out of food
- Now I have never been hungry- not truly
- Never had to wonder if I was going to get a next meal, at most inconvenienced by a delay, or even missing one meal
- And I don't want to reduce what these people were feeling and experiencing-
 - They were looking into the wilderness and seeing starvation
 - And their anxiety and fear, as real as it is, gets the best of them and they turn on Moses and Aaron
 - They even misremember Egypt- they start dreaming about big bowls of meat, and unlimited bread sticks... loaves
- Of course the point of this story and why it's in the Torah and our Bible, is that God provided
- God was there, even when they questioned it, even when they realistically feared the worse, God was there
- Moses prayed to God about their fear, their hunger, their longing, and even their lack of faith
- And God was there
- Bread from heaven, Mana, was found on the ground, they could eat all they wanted
- But notice they could not save any- no leftovers... no mana soup for the next week, for those of you were here last Sunday
- God provided for them physically, and also spiritually in continuing to challenge them into greater faith, greater reliance on God
- For each day they would wake up and have to gather anew, trusting that God would provide again and again
- It was a faith building exercise- in providing for their stomachs, is nurturing their spiritual awareness and dependence
- That like that mysterious, white, edible frost they found each morning- always there, always fresh, never left over
- That the same kind of provision was there in spirit, getting them through the wildernesses of a spiritual kind
- And I think a definite pointer to the similarities between the two
- John's Gospel brings Jesus onto the scene in what has become known as the "bread of life" discourse
 - It only happens in John's Gospel
 - If you'll tolerate a little bit of didactic Bible info:

- Matthew, Mark, and Luke are synoptic gospels, root word synopsis, or summary,
 - And are quite similar
- Mark was written down first around 65AD or so¹
- Matthew and Luke came second, and had so much in common that we think they used a shared hypothetical source we call Q
- And then by 100 AD- that's an entire generation that had passed- John's gospel was written² - it is not considered synoptic
- The average life span was only about 35 years then... ³ and honestly did not really improve for 1000 years
- A little math says that it is at least the grandchildren, or great grand children, generation of those who may have actually met Jesus
- Where as Mark has no birth story, and refers to Jesus as the "Son of Man" repeatedly and deals with mostly the facts
- John comes along with some theology
- He opens his gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word," and he was life and light,
 - And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and his name was Jesus
- Now Jesus feeds the five thousand families in all four Gospels!
 - But only in John does Jesus discuss the bread of life afterward
- Imagine the setup- Jesus has just fed 5000 families, the miracle of making more where there was less
- And as we talked last week, the miracle was just as much about the loaves and fish
 - As it was getting a hungry crowd to have enough faith to share even though they feared scarcity
- Then the disciples get into the boat and cross the lake, and yet somehow the crowd also finds Jesus on the other side also!
- They are still trying to figure out how he crossed that lake, although we have some insider knowledge about the walking on the water bit
- And they are mesmerized at the miraculous- enthralled by this man named Jesus who seems surprise them at every turn
- And they want more.
- How many signs do people need? the usual answer: one more
- But Jesus tries to take them a little further, a little deeper into what we have been already talking about this morning

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Mark#Authorship,_date_and_genre

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_John#Composition

³ <https://earlychurchhistory.org/daily-life/longevity-in-the-ancient-world/>

- Using the physical- like food, hunger, water- to remind us something about soul and spirit
- Jesus says, do not work for the food that perishes, but the food that endures forever
 - “I am the bread of life”
- Do you think they got it? Surely not completely
- But maybe some of them did, maybe they caught a glimpse of what Jesus was getting at
- That human beings need something just as much as we need food- we need that connection to our creator and to each other
- That there is a deep yearning and need within each of us for it
- Sometimes I think it might be a little easier for the hungry or desperate to really understand what Jesus is saying, and what Jesus is offering
 - They already know what it is like to be truly dependent for their next meal
 - But for you and me perhaps, with full bellies, we forget that we need it just as much
 - Jesus came to offer us life, but more than physical existence, Jesus comes to offer much more
 - I wonder sometimes if I short change that offering⁴- if I look at my life and don't realize what all I so desperately need
 - And what Jesus is really offering
 - I may know what is stressing me today, I may know what challenges I am facing
 - But do I really know, do I really ask for, the abundant life Jesus wants me to have, is calling me to?
 - It is like my favorite restaurant in Memphis... do I go there just to eat some calories to survive
 - Or do I go there for other reasons?
 - Oh yeah, it's a lot more than just the calories that my bodies needs
 - I can get those anywhere, and do
 - My favorite restaurant gives me something else I need: enjoyment, respite, entertainment, and time with my family
 - Imagine how much more Jesus is offering than even the best food
 - Over and over again Jesus points us to this Kingdom of God that is breaking in
 - That is unseen, yet everywhere
 - This deeper existence than anything else we can find

⁴ Soards, Marion, ed., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year B After Pentecost 1, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) 140-1

- One where we are deeply connected to our source, come what may in this life
 - And one that that we are deeply connected to each other
- And sometimes we get too busy and we miss it.
- Our lives are full of highs and lows, crises and victories, and sometimes a lot of the “status quo” in between
- This week at St. Michael’s is an excellent example of the mountain top
 - We had a fantastic VBS turned into an unexpected week of meeting new families and evangelism
 - We had a hard working LIFT group, with teens and sponsors working their tails off improving the Sturtz House patio
 - And then, on Friday, we celebrated and raised over \$40k for seven Barrington area charities that help people right here
 - What a great moment of joy and celebration for a good cause after such a hard 16 months
- And yet today I am hit with more pandemic news, more mask mandates, unknown questions about the kids in school next year
- It keeps coming, doesn’t it
- Folks have challenges with kids, jobs, parents, school, mental and emotional health
- The stress today is just as great as it was last year when we were new to this whole pandemic
- We can feel it in our gut, the stress, the worry, the longing for joy and connectedness
- And what I hear today is that like Israel longing for bread,
 - And the crowd with Jesus who are longing for a contentment that surpasses the belly
- Is that God is still ready and longing to take that next step with us
- Ready to give us that deeper peace, inner strength, and purpose that is a life stuff full of divine love and acceptance for who we are
- A place of spiritual abundance that never runs out of sustenance, spiritual waters that never run dry
- And like the Israelites and the crowd, it is offered to us each and every day anew and it is something the world cannot take away
- As we come to this altar later this morning, and week to week
- As you pray in your daily prayer time, listen deeply in the silence
- Let our prayer be like this crowd: “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Amen.