

August 5, 2018 11th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15 Psalm 78:23-29
Ephesians 4:1-7, 14-16, John 6:24-35

[Debie Thomas' blog piece called Bread of Heaven posted on Journey with Jesus on 7-29-18
(Thomas includes within this the quotes from Lauren Winner and Nadia Bolz Weber).]

Grace and peace, the very Bread of Life, to you, dear people of God, the bread of angels. Amen.

I carry a big shoulder bag.

When our kids were younger, I'd have diapers and wipes and assorted baby stuff

Later, I carried small pairs of underwear, just in case of an accident; it's a bummer to be without.

Now days my bag is still assorted and it almost always includes granola bars and applesauce packets,
ready for the inevitable peal of hunger.

This week I've been reflecting on a blog called Journey with Jesus and the thoughtful questions and reflections of Debie Thomas.

I borrow some of her words and structure today. She asks questions like:

"Am I hungry?" Take a moment, check in with your body, then check in with you soul. Am I hungry? ...

And, if so, "what am I hungry for?" ...

And, if I'm not hungry "what has made me full?" ...

Her questions continue: "Am I ashamed of my hunger?"

Or, "Does fullness scare me?"

And, "What kind of bread do I substitute for Jesus?"

We're in a five-week run of scripture readings about bread, specifically the Bread of Life.

This is week #2.

The way our lectionary assigns the readings, this marathon happens every three years, always in the late days of summer.

Preachers do things like go on vacation, for five weeks is a long time, and yet I admit these are some of my favorite Jesus stories.

Truthfully, I didn't plan my vacation around the assigned readings☺

but I am immeasurably grateful to Tom Carlson and Nick Tangen for preaching these last weeks,

and to John Rydeen and Kirsten Mebust, the preaching team, who help arrange for these gospel voices.

Last week that tremendous crowd had settled on the hillside, and with bread and fish in hand, Jesus was practicing this radical, risky, essential hospitality...and they had enough.

This week, John continues, and Jesus is pushing past perishable food, and going deep.

Deep into our real hunger, our real fears, our real need.

The truth is, I like talk of food and feeding and hospitality.

I like the baskets overflowing and the promise of abundance, maybe you do too.

I write letters for Bread for the World.

I support food shelves.

I've served at soup kitchens.

I love the new farmers market.

I'm eager for the bread oven.

God knows, along with baptism, holy communion is my favorite sacrament!

What more is there about this passage?

But Jesus is going deep, he says, **"I am the Bread of Life. No one who comes to me will be hungry."**

Sure, he's called us to follow, to believe, to learn, but here in a frighteningly intimate and provocative move, he says essentially, "Feast on me. Feast on me, and never be hungry again."

Debie Thomas writes, "What's at stake for me in this strange invitation is whether or not I will move past religion and into intimacy.

Past abstraction and into communion.

Past self-sufficiency and into radical, whole-life dependence on a God I can taste but never control."

"We become what we eat, after all." And then she asks, "So what am I becoming?"

Writer and theologian and Episcopal priest Lauren Winner writes about Jesus as bread.

She says, "In calling himself 'the bread of life,' — and not, say, crème caramel or caviar — Jesus is identifying with basic food, with sustenance, with the food that, for centuries afterward, would figure in the protest efforts of poor and marginalized people."

She goes on, "No one holds caviar riots; people riot for bread."

"So to speak of God as bread is to speak of God's most elemental provision for us."

Are you hungry for God? Am I hungry for God?

Not God as a fancy appetizer.

Not God as a special after dinner treat...if we've been good, if we've cleared our plate.

But am I hungry for God as elemental provisions, everyday staple, food so necessary, so essential, that without God we will simply starve, we will die?

Debie Thomas calls this the hunger beneath the hunger.

Oh, I know that hunger, that soul-hunger: I sense it in those I talk with, I feel it in myself.

Sometimes it seems easier to just think about physical hunger—feed people.

That's what Jesus did first: he fed them, that's our calling, too. But Jesus didn't stop there.

With a nudge and a question, harkening back to the manna on that long desert journey to freedom, Jesus pushes them to trust more deeply: feast on me he says, feast on me, satisfy your soul-hunger.

So what am I hungry for?

That's a personal question, and I'll share my hunger and you can name your own.

I have a perennial yearning for what I call a bread and wine party—it is such a strong yearning, I can taste the bread, the olive oil I'd serve with it, the hard cheese and salt.

The yearning is as much a desire for bread, as it is a desire to share it with some of our closest friends and community.

In that, there is an intimacy of conversation,
there's a vulnerability and acceptance,
there's a shared search for meaning and hope, especially in these times,
there are tears and there is laughter, there is freedom,
there is a faith lived and shared, a stumble and a righting oneself,
there is a closeness with God that comes, in part, in genuine, faithful community.

So I can name that hunger, that's good, but do I turn to Jesus to fill it? Do you?

Do you trust that Jesus is your most elemental provision?

We get so busy, we fill our time with that which yammers for attention.

Sometimes we fill it with that which helps us avoid going deep, avoid facing the hunger, or listening for God.

Sometimes we think we aren't worthy of feasting on this Bread of Life.

Nadia Bolz Weber writes,

"It's hard to accept not just that God welcomes all, but that God welcomes all of me, all of you."

She continues: "Even that within us we wish to hide: the part that cursed at our children this week, or drank alone, or has a problem with lying, or hates our body..."

All these parts of us we wish Jesus had the good sense **to not** welcome to his table are invited to taste and see that the Lord is good."

Feast on me, Jesus says, feast on me, for we are what we eat.

And we are back to relationship, back to a God who meets us at the table of forgiveness,
who feeds us—body and soul—with God's very self,
who welcomes us in our hunger and who fills us with love, that we can feed and love each other.

Today or tomorrow, I invite you to carve out a little space to go deep.

Am I hungry? Ask yourself that.

And then, and this can be scary, listen for God and give yourself the space to honestly answer.

May you feast again on the Bread of Life...and may you be bread for the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.