

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a; Psalm 51:1-13; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

A deep spiritual hunger is implanted in every human heart.

Different people will seek to fill this need in different ways, but the hunger is not unique. People yearn for a deeper connection, an eternal spiritual connection, and when that is lacking will seek any means to be fulfilled.

Jesus said He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. Yet, He who offered fullness of joy was often met by people with simpler, lesser needs. In the fifth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus met a Samaritan woman who longed for living water so she wouldn't have to keep returning to the well each day. Jesus started with that basic need and used it to forge a relationship with her that ended with the woman reconnected to God and to others in her community.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus has met the immediate needs of a host of people. Those remaining after he fed five thousand with a little fish and bread seek out Jesus. Jesus tells them, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

The previous day, Jesus fed their physical hunger with bread and fish, and the crowd sought Him out once more. Jesus points them to their spiritual hunger, which is what He really wanted to fill. After all, the people were created to love God and love others as they loved themselves, and in chasing after other needs, they risked getting further from the real nourishment they

needed.

Jesus compares this to the original bread from heaven, manna, with which God miraculously fed the children of Israel for forty years in a desert wasteland. This was the daily bread that would come anew each morning, with enough to last the day and a double portion for the Sabbath. Now Jesus compares the daily bread of manna, which God gave in the desert, to the Bread of Life, which God offers in Jesus Christ. Jesus says, “Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.”

Jesus offers nourishment, which goes to the heart of our most basic human need to fill a spiritual hunger. Having been created to be in relationship with God, without that connection, we can feel empty.

It is an easy move to connect with Jesus referring to Himself as the Bread of Life to the Eucharist. For in the mystery of the Eucharistic feast, we eat the bread and drink the wine, and in so doing we partake of the body and blood of Jesus. But we don’t want to jump to that correct response so quickly that we miss the bigger picture.

These words from Jesus come when He has two more years of ministry ahead of Him. There is much more time left in Jesus’ ministry before He gets to that last meal with His disciples.

John’s gospel makes clear what the other three Gospels only hint at: the Eucharist is not about Jesus’ death alone. Jesus’ self-giving act in communion is not only concerned with the Last Supper, the cross and the empty tomb alone. Jesus’ whole life, rather than just one or two events, will institute the sacrament of communion. Put differently, faith is not in Jesus’ death and resurrection alone, but in Jesus’ entire life.

Everything Jesus did, who Jesus was and how He acted, are part

of God's revelation to us. We cannot separate one part of His life from the rest. Nor should we have a Christian part of our lives separate from the rest of our lives. We are to take Jesus' whole story and make it part of our whole story.

In baptism, water is poured over us as a sign that we are united with Christ through baptism. In the Eucharist, we don't merely listen to the words, "Take eat," but we actually take and eat. It's not just the bread that we take, bless, break and give. God took Jesus' whole life, blessed, broke it and gave it to us. We are to let that story of God's love for us take us, bless us, break us, and give us back to the world.

Jesus wanted those who followed Him after having their fill of fish and bread to discover real spiritual nourishment so that they would never hunger again. Yes, we are fed through the Eucharist, but this too is only part of the picture. Our Sunday worship is to be just a part of how we are fed spiritually.

Eating out in a restaurant on a regular basis is not unusual. What if that was the only meal a person ate? Someone who goes back to their familiar restaurant regularly to enjoy that one meal, would never be nourished enough to sustain their body.

In the same way, common worship in church on Sunday is meant to be an important part of one's spiritual food and drink, but it will never satisfy your hunger if this is your whole plan for feeding you spirit.

Fortunately, the Anglican Church has pattern of daily prayer that is well suited to filling this void. The Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer are a wonderfully enriching daily devotion. When praying in this way, together with the daily scripture readings, one is better prepared to meet whatever comes. It is not that troubles never occur to people who pray and read their Bible; it's just that those who partake daily in prayer and

scripture, are more connected to God, as revealed in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, whatever comes, they can call on that connection.

For those looking for an easy way to get started, there is the very helpful “Forward Day by Day,” which in booklet form or online, offers a brief daily reflection to accompany the scripture readings. The booklet offers the same readings as those used in the Daily Office. Either way, there is no better way to nourish our spiritual side than through a daily meal of prayer and scripture reading.

So much of our lives is spent working for the food that perishes.

We must work to earn food, water and shelter, and all the extras that make life enjoyable. But we know there is more to life than the daily grind. For a fulfilled life, we should commit a portion of each day to prayer and reading the Bible, for that is the food that endures for eternal life, and the gift of Jesus, who came so that we might have an abundant life.

AMEN.