



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

Thanksgiving Eve Service- November 27th, 2019

“Is That All You’re Gonna Eat?”

Gospel Text: John 25-35

On this eve of feasting, let’s remember the people of Israel who wandered in the desert for 40 years and learned a thing or two about food. Imagine eating two meals a day, the same thing every day for 40 years. Manna. It’s a word that in Hebrew literally means, “What is IT?!”

If you take it literally, that’s 21,216 meals of the same thing. Way back when I was in high school, the Christian musician, Keith Green wrote a song called, “So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt” about the manna. People were so tired of the manna, that even though they were no longer enslaved, they imagined that maybe being captive wasn’t so bad because the food was better.

Green’s song jokes about “what’s for dinner?” Manna burgers, Manna patties, Filet of Manna, and my favorite, Ba-Manna Bread.

It sounds like the worst run of meals ever.

And yet, that manna sustained the people through the wilderness.

Even though the manna and eventually the quails, and the water in the desert were all provided by God, because people saw these things happen with Moses as the leader, by the time we get to the gospel, the story is told that MOSES made sure they had those things.

Hungry people are now following Jesus because Jesus has just fed 5000 people from a couple pieces of bread and some fish. After the first people have eaten, everyone else is just getting leftovers, but somehow in the story, no one mentions that. We hear everyone ate their fill and was satisfied.

In the people’s minds it is Jesus the rabbi who has made this happen. That’s as big of a vision as they see.

When they show up looking for more, Jesus tells them all they’re thinking about is their stomachs. That’s kind of an ironic thing to say, where tonight this sermon is standing between you all and the pies downstairs for the pie social.

When Jesus tells people they’re just thinking about their stomachs, he’s not telling them that all they are thinking about is food. Because frankly, when your mission is come to show God’s care for the poor and the downtrodden, and the hungry, that would be pretty harsh. They probably are actually hungry. Jesus is instead being like your grandmother at the dinner table, who has so many things to offer you, but all you do is fill up on bread.

It’s like Jesus is asking, “Is that all you’re gonna eat?”

Bishop Craig Satterlee writes, “When we look back at the Israelites, or the first followers of Jesus, we can fall into wondering why they didn’t see it because

“we know the end of God’s story...for the people in the Bible -- manna, quail, promised land; suffering, death, resurrection. And we know intellectually God’s story with us: water, word, table; abundant and eternal life.”

It’s not only that Jesus wants the disciples and you and I to keep seeking him to be fed, but that we discover in our seeking what being fed by our relationship with God is really about.

God desires much more for all of us than fast food.

But do we expect more from God?

Do we sometimes settle for signs of God’s grace -- bread from whatever source -- rather than seeking and expecting God’s immortal love for us? Do we work for the food that perishes, rather than the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Humanity gives us, because we are unwilling or unable to name what we truly hunger for and seek?...

That’s what the expression eating our feelings gets at.

Perhaps we fear being disappointed, or that we are not deserving. Perhaps sometimes we assume that we and others have to work to get what we truly hunger for and seek. Or we struggle with how much is enough. If that is true for us, these questions press even harder when the stakes are war and peace, safety and security, food, water, and health care, the economy and the environment for everyone.

So “What must we do, Jesus?”

Jesus responds to us as he did the crowd: “This is the work of God, that you **believe in him whom God has sent.**” **And keep believing.**

Keep trusting that God is doing something new that human-created conditions and circumstances cannot undermine or negate. To believe is to submit everything, even our highest-stake issues, to God’s saving work in Jesus. To believe is not so much what we do as being open to what God is doing. Of course, being open to what God is doing and submitting everything to Jesus means that might not seem wise, practical, advantageous, or a safe choice. In fact, being open to God and submitting everything to Jesus means that our doing is less important because we are not in charge, let alone in control.

If we’re going to do that much less in a sustained way, we need some assurance, some guarantee. Perhaps we now understand the crowd asking, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and (keep) believing you?”

For a people wandering away from what was bad, but at least they had known it, to a promised land not yet seen, Moses gave manna to their ancestors, and their ancestors believed. What made the feeding a sign was not the manna, but it came down from heaven.

The manna was only an appetizer for the true bread that came down from heaven, Jesus. God rather than Moses fed the people in the wilderness. And God sent Jesus, who in his teaching and his flesh is the bread that fulfills all our hunger and thirst.

Bread of life that frees us from having to keep trying to achieve anything. Instead, we are called to continually embracing God's ongoing redeeming will to restore the cosmos to what God created and humanity to what God intends." The truly abundant life. Where we see it, we give thanks. Where it is absent, we work to make it known because we follow Jesus.

A day of Thanksgiving only began after years of petitioning by Sarah Josepha Hale, who, at age 74, convinced President Lincoln, to declare such a day in the aftermath of a bloody battle at Gettysburg. In October of 1863, amidst still raging war, Lincoln issued a proclamation beginning with these words:

"The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence (and hand) of Almighty God..."

Tomorrow, cultural Christianity encourages us to carve out a moment from our feasting to give God a tiny piece of our attention.

And God asks, "is that all you're gonna eat?"

The greater life Jesus call us to does not mean separating the spiritual out of the social. It means God, rather than you and I, is at the center of both.

God's hand is at the heart of our feasting and living.

Feast well on the bread of life.