



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Bread is Whatever Feeds Your Hunger The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost 882021

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

As I was praying about what to say today and reading our passage from the Gospel of John, chapter six, which is such an incredible passage in the gospels, two things came to mind. The first was an experience that Claire and I had when we were in our twenties. We were staying at my in-law's house on Nantucket. We were in between different careers and things like that. So we didn't have a lot of money and we were trying to find a way to live cheaply and simply surrounded by this island that was full of privilege. And we got to know a baker and a chef, a personal chef for a person who had a huge estate.

And she had us over to sit with her and have dinner at the Gatehouse where she was staying and we wanted to bring something. And so I brought Portuguese bread, pão caseiro, which is a kind of house bread that is special on the island. And I brought her the bread and she immediately took it and she ripped a piece and she began to look at it closely and to study the bubble and to smell the aroma and to mole and roll the crust in her hands.

And it was the first time that I saw ordinary bread as somewhat mysterious and beautiful and powerful. And I was so amazed at her ability as a chef to study the bread and to see what that bread looked like through her eyes for a moment. I was amazed and touched. And I thought about this experience because for the past three weeks, we have been in one of the most important statements about bread in the Bible in which Jesus is sharing bread by feeding 5,000 souls and people who needed food, people who were in the wilderness, who had followed him.

And Pastor Manisha did an incredible job speaking about that miracle of loaves and fishes and drawing the kind of connection we need to have in this church. And that we have in this church between the bread that is celebrated in the Eucharist on our table and the people who are hungry that we serve by giving them food to eat. And I am never so proud of this congregation and the work that we do as when we work to ensure that there is better food security.

Last week, Father Chris gave an incredible sermon on Jesus as the bread of life and spoke about the kind of unexpected blessing that happens in the pandemic

when we were forced to slow down and had a chance to reflect upon ourselves. And to see ourselves differently in the light of God, as difficult as it was for so many of us. But we have only begun to study the bread that is Christ, and we could spend days and months on this passage to explore and study what does it mean for Jesus to be the bread of life, as He says today in the gospels? And what does it mean for us to meet Jesus in a place where bread is broken and blessed and shared?

And so, as I was thinking about what was my part to say today, as we go into this incredible rich piece of scripture, it is to focus on the fact that Jesus comes to us in the breaking of bread. And that is not to simply say that Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist and the moment in which we participate in the body and blood of Christ in which we recreate and participate in a meal that was part of the past, but also part of the present and future of our life in Christ. For that meal is that moment in which we are bound to Christ and He is bound to us. But also to say that the fact that Jesus came as bread and that Jesus was revealed in the midst of the blessing and breaking and sharing of bread, that renders our world mysterious. It provides us with a kind of window and perspective to see God in everyday experiences.

And that is a profound blessing because part of the implication of today's gospel is that wherever bread is blessed and broken and shared, you will find Jesus. And that for me is something that is almost too much to bear. A mystery that is so deep, even though I sometimes miss it, even though it sometimes catches me off guard, it is a mystery that is almost too much to bear. And yet it says everything about what it means to follow Jesus and to meet Jesus in the breaking of bread.

The second thing that came to me as I was praying through this service and this sermon, and this passage from John was the title of my sermon, which is so weird because usually I never have titles for my sermons. And afterwards our AB person says, do you have a title? I'm like, I'm thinking about it. But the title that came to me is this: Bread is Whatever Feeds Your Hunger. And I've wondered and kind of struggled with that. Why is that phrase sticking in my mind? Bread is Whatever Feeds Your Hunger.

And I have begun to see that what I'm trying to say today is that when we meet Jesus in the breaking of the bread, when Jesus is present in these everyday experiences, the Christ who is both present and absent as Martin Luther liked to say, when we meet Jesus in that way, we realize that Jesus has broken down all the barriers that stand between us and has accommodated Himself in God's love to come to us as whatever bread means to us and whatever our hunger is.

So to say that Bread is Whatever Feeds Your Hunger is to invite us to ask a question, which seems self-evident, but is actually a bit mysterious. The question being, what is bread? And what is hunger? What is bread? I did a little bit of

research over the past week. It's actually hard to define what bread is. It's not the fact that it's made of wheat because the flour that becomes bread could be made of just about any kind of staple, a bean, a potato, corn. It's not the fact that bread is leavened through yeast because there are many breads that don't have any yeast.

The original meaning of bread was loaf. Bread came about a little bit later. And what is a loaf? A loaf is a kind of shape, but is that shape bread? The Food and Drug Administration has a very precise definition of bread. I love this. It says bread is something that is baked and weighs more than half a pound. If it's less than half a pound, then it's a roll. But of course, something that is baked and more than half a pound, that could be a ham, right? To define exactly what bread is in the everyday sense of that word is actually a bit mysterious. What is bread?

And I want to suggest to you that bread is whatever gives you life. Whatever keeps you going, physically, emotionally, spiritually. Bread is whatever is a kind of staff of life to you, whatever sustains you is bread. And because of that, bread can emerge in mysterious ways in our life. Even through physical bread.

Years ago, I was invited by an incredible leader of the Mohawk Nation. His name was Bob Watts, and he wanted me to meet with some survivors of a residential school in Ontario, the Mohawk Institute. And as many of you know, there have been so many horrible things that happened that these schools, people were abused, raped, assaulted, and died, and children never came back home.

And so I agreed to go meet with some survivors and I brought bread. There was a bakery I like. I like bakeries. I brought some bread. And as soon as I got there, I realized that I had made a mistake because the government in May often would bring bread and cheese to the Mohawk as a kind of way of reminding them of the interdependence between them. And so bringing bread was actually a kind of faux pas. It would trigger the people I was meeting with.

And as soon as I got there, Bob Watts came up to me, he says, here, I'll just take that bread and I'll put it over here. And so he put it on a table outside of the circle we sat in. And then after a small opening ritual, these people, mostly women, told of their experience at the Mohawk Institute. And at the end, one of them said to me, this is the first time I haven't been afraid sitting next to a priest. And then at that moment, when she said it, Bob went over to the table and he said, let's have some bread and he broke it and he gave it and we ate it. An ordinary meal but it was an extraordinary moment of grace, a kind of sacrament of reconciliation, all but named.

What is bread for you? What do you need? What sustains you? Is it kindness such as we read today in our reading from Ephesians where Paul almost says bread, when he says we are members of one another, we're all parts of the same

body, all parts of the same bread as he says elsewhere. So be kind to one another. Is it forgiveness? Is it a kind of grace? Is it the joy that has sometimes been elusive over the past year and a half? Is it peace? Part of the work of meeting Jesus wherever bread is broken is naming for yourself what that bread is.

What is hunger? Years ago, I had a chance to see hunger in a way that I've never seen before. Since I was taking a group of students on a trip through South Africa and we moved into the eastern part of the country into Mthatha, which they liked to say was the real Africa, whatever that means. And it was an incredible place. It's the province from which Nelson Mandela was born and raised. It's an amazing place. Beautiful, wonderful rolling hills and the worst poverty I've ever seen juxtaposed with incredible wealth.

And after spending a few days there walking through townships, meeting people, meeting church leaders, we're heading on our way to Cape Town. And we were in the van and my students said that they were hungry. And so I did what every time you do, as you're leading a group of students, you feed them. And so we pulled into this grocery store that was as nice as a Whole Foods. Surrounded by those tin shacks, but there's out of nowhere, this bit of prosperity.

And I went in and I got bags of groceries. And as I came out, I saw these three boys sitting next to the dumpster and they were starving. They were starving. And I had never seen someone up close, truly starving, and they were waiting for the trash to be put out so that they could go through it and find something to eat.

And they were covered with dust because they weren't moving very fast. And so I left some of the groceries with my students and I took a big bag of groceries and the tallest one stood up. And I said, you're going to share these with these other two, right? And he said, they are my brothers, of course, in other words. And I gave him the groceries and I got back into the van.

And I'll never forget the driver who is from Mthatha said, where is their mother? And then one of my students who was incredibly brilliant, said she sent them there. So when I think about hunger, I think about physical hunger, the tragedy, the injustice of physical hunger, the unfairness of physical hunger, but hunger also can be something that is a kind of blessing because there is a spiritual hunger that gets born in us when we recognize that we are members of one another.

And that experience of hunger face to face, that experience of hunger has motivated me to be part of many attempts and work to eradicate hunger here. More so, that spiritual hunger that was born inside of me is a kind of blessing because it makes me hungry for God. One of the challenges of living the spiritual life is the spiritual hunger that we have actually increases the more God

is present in our lives. We don't become full when we get in touch with God, we actually become hungrier. We want to see more of God.

And one of the tragedies of life is we tend to confuse spiritual hunger for material hunger. One of the tragedies of life is so often we try to address spiritual hunger by some kind of intoxicant, by having a drink, by taking a drug, by some kind of affirmation, whether it comes through something physical we own or purchase. So often we have a spiritual hunger that is unaddressed and masked because we cannot name it. And we cannot and dare not address it because it fills us with fear. So when we ask what is hunger, the question is what is the lack inside of you? What is the thing that is missing? What is the thing you crave, what keeps you restless?

So in this title, Bread is Whatever Feeds Your Hunger, I'm inviting us all to think powerfully about what it means for Jesus to be our bread. How is Jesus present in the blessing and breaking of bread in our midst, whether that bread is physical, whether that bread is joy or spiritual or grace, inviting us all to see a kind of sacramental life. Because the grace of Christ is that Jesus comes and is present and is with us and loves us and bound himself to us so that we might truly know and experience the bread of life.

Amen.