



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Bread of Life The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost 812021

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving God. Amen.

Last week during coffee hour, over here, some of us were talking about the whole quarantine experience last year and whether or not any of us had any positive things to say about it. And a number of things were mentioned, getting some of those much needed projects done around that. Exercising more, walking, spending more time with family. Although for those of us, with little kids in the house all day long, your experience may vary.

But the one thing we seem to all agree on is how it forced us to slow down, to take a kind of timeout from the frenetic pace that our lives had been accustomed to. Think back to, what, 2019. Can you remember how busy life seemed? Writing in the Boston Globe well before the pandemic, Dr. Suzanne Koven described a new epidemic of sorts: patients complaining of fatigue, irritability, insomnia, anxiety, headaches, heartburn, gastrointestinal whatever, back pain, weight gain. Any of that sound familiar? Their condition wasn't more stress - excessive busy-ness.

We shouldn't be surprised, I suppose, in a country where we are largely defined by what we do and what we produce. It makes sense that our busy-ness would become a kind of badge of honor. And by the way, complaining about our busy-ness, right? A kind of virtue signal. And then there was that pre COVID phenomenon of FOMO. Do you remember hearing about that one? I've seen a couple of nodding heads. It's an acronym for fear of missing out. It describes that anxiety we feel when we see an exciting or interesting event happening somewhere else and it's happening without us.

Of course, FOMO is nothing new. It's essentially a version of the old keeping up with the Joneses. Except thanks to social media, we're no longer just looking at our immediate neighbors. We're looking at everyone, right? Our extended family, our neighbors, our friends, our coworkers, our book club friends, people from church, all of whom seem to be having this wonderful time together. Posing for selfies, visiting fabulous places, having a wonderful time without us.

And what about that other pre-pandemic meme, alone together? Did you hear that one? That's the family we all gathered in the living room or that group of people who have all gone out to dinner and everyone, it seems, has their head

down in their phones, right? Physically together. Yeah. But totally alone. Responding to emails, anxiously doom scrolling, all the things they're missing out on totally oblivious to the real community right in front of them. And by the way, I've done that. 'm speaking from experience here.

And if you think it's just a problem for adults, ask your grandchildren, ask your children about busy-ness. I saw it firsthand in my office a few years ago at another church. A teen at a local high school had committed suicide the second in the course of a year. And one of the kids who knew the boy was at the church with her mom. And I mentioned that we had made arrangements for a counselor to come to talk to the teen group so they could sort of unpack this together. And she was like, wow, that's great. Tell me more. What time? And then mom interrupted, "Oh honey, you can't go to that. You've got that science test for Mrs. So-and-so. You've got that band practice that night." And the daughter without skipping a beat was like, "Oh, right, right. What was I thinking?" I'm like, did I really just hear that?

So, I don't think it's a stretch to say that for a culture addicted to busy-ness, the COVID lockdown was kind of like a national intervention of sorts. We all had to go cold turkey from our schedules and our commitments. And it was a shock at first. We were resentful at first. Some of us still are. But in time, some of us began to appreciate this collective timeout because it was a chance to breathe and to find some perspective on what really matters in our life.

And it was a chance to reflect as well on just what was it that was keeping us so busy? What was driving us so hard? What was the emptiness we were trying to fill? Why the constant need to do, and the resistance to simply be? Perhaps you've heard an old saying that goes something like this: Inside each of us is a God shaped hole, a place inside our hearts that only God can fill. Yet we spend so much of our lives trying to fill it with everything else.

Have you heard that? It's a paraphrase of a 17th century French mathematician, Blaise Pascal, who himself might've been paraphrasing Saint Augustine, who in the fourth century said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

It's a spiritual truth. One that can be found at the heart of all the worlds enduring religious traditions. In Buddhism, we are warned not to fill it with attachments, attachments to things like our youth, our looks, our things, our power, our money, even our health, because all of them will eventually fail us and lead to suffering.

In Judaism and Islam, we are warned against idolatry. Trying to fill that hole in our heart with man-made gods; idols of all kinds, which our consumer culture is more than happy to provide, but only leads us further from God. Even in secular

recovery spirituality, they too are quick to remind us that there is no chemical solution for a spiritual problem.

And of course, all of this echoes Jesus who said, among other things, do not store for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal. What should we be looking for? That's the question on the minds of our crowd today in our gospel, they've just witnessed the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 and follow Jesus to Capernaum, looking for more.

And instead Jesus surprises them by saying, I know you came because of the bread that filled your stomach. I have come to offer you the bread of life. What comes to your mind when you hear that? What does the bread of life fulfill in you? Is it a hunger to feel loved and accepted for who you are? Is it the courage to be yourself, to be the person God made you to be, no matter what the world might say, what your own family might say?

Is it a thirst to know that no matter what mistakes I've made, no matter what I've done, no matter who I might have hurt, I will always be forgiven and I will always be welcomed home. Is it the joy of knowing that I can finally relax because there's nothing I have to do to earn God's love, and nothing more I need to offer to others? Perhaps it's the peace of mind of knowing no matter what this life might throw at me, I will never be alone. Because the God who made me will always be with me, always be beside me and will always be there to catch me when I fall and to raise me up on the last day.

I'm guessing this is what the crowd had in their mind as well, because they immediately asked Jesus, well, how do we get this bread? The answer, both remarkably simple and remarkably hard. Come to me, believe in me, put down all those other things that keep you so busy. Put your trust in me. By the way, trust, not just in the name of Jesus, not just in the identity even of Jesus, but trust our lives in the way of Jesus.

Which brings us to the lesson of the manna. God told the Israelites He would provide for them each day. All they needed to do was to go out and collect it. But some of them struggled with trusting in God. They believed in God just fine. They had seen the waters parted. They saw what He did to Pharaoh. They knew God's power but still some of them weren't ready to trust their lives to God. They wanted to stay in control. They wanted to do it themselves. They decided that they would work even harder, get even busier, collect even more, build even bigger barns, store up even more of it so they would never have to rely on anyone else again.

Does that sound familiar? Did that work? No. The stored up manna spoiled every night because the bread of life isn't about working more or staying busy. It's not about production. It's not about storing up and building bigger barns. It's not

about being the first or having the most, no, that was Pharaoh's economy, right? God was teaching them a new economy, a new way of being that begins with trust, daily trust in God.

And when we can do that, when we can shut the noise out and resist the temptation to keep up and to not miss out, when we can put down our plans and our agendas and our to-do lists, and every day open ourselves up to God's, our world opens up. Our imaginations start to expand. We start to see things more clearly. We start to see the things that truly feed us. And the need to do starts to give way to the ability to simply be.

Did you notice any of that happening in your life over the past year? I can't tell you how many people I know who have made changes in their lives following quarantine. Some of you have moved out of state to be closer to your children. I've seen others, beginning with my own brother and sister, move to Michigan to simply live more cheaply, more simply, and to be closer to one another. Some of you have changed jobs, so you can keep working at home and be closer to your family, while others have switched careers altogether to find work with a greater sense of purpose.

Some of you have taken up new spiritual practices like weekly Bible study or daily prayer. And some of you are even discerning a call to ordained life. In that coffee hour group, someone shared how she used to throw big lavish dinner parties, you know, the ones with multiple courses and all the trimmings and all the forks and the dinner things arranged just right. But she noticed she was so busy being Martha, if you will - working so hard in the kitchen trying to get everything just perfect - that by the end of the night, when everyone had gone home, she found herself asking, who did she really connect with? Did she have a single meaningful conversation with anyone? Now she channels her inner Mary. She hosts only small gatherings, four or six people, much simpler meals so she can actually be present; knowing that it was the connection, not the extravagant meal that she truly craved.

All of those changes, big ones, small ones. All of them to me are healthy signs that the pandemic might have helped some of us heed the words of Jesus: to be less busy, to be more connected to the things that truly feed us and closer to the only one who can.

And by the way, if you have already found yourself slipping into your old ways, your old schedules, your old commitments, amen. Don't be hard on yourself. Don't be hard on yourself. Relapses are a part of recovery. We all know that. Just look at the Israelites in our reading, some of whom wanted to actually return to the relentless production schedules of Pharaoh. Why? Well, at least they knew where their next meal was going to come from. You know, it's what they knew.

And there's a comfort in that, which is a good reminder that taking the risk to trust in God, it can feel like wilderness for us. It can be scary and it's normal to want to turn back, but don't let that stop you from taking the next right step, the next right step to put down things temporal. Make space in your life to simply be. To be closer to one another, closer to Jesus, and closer to the day when our souls might finally rest in the only one who can truly fulfill us.

Amen.