

“And they ate and were well filled,
for God gave them what they craved.” AMEN!

We begin at the end... Jesus said,
“I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

It's a lofty promise!

Whoever comes to Jesus will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in Him will never be thirsty.

John poetic style of writing spurs the
imagination of God's love and we just want
to stay in that place.

Dwell there and focus on,
well... what he said...
at the end.

But, as we continue our walk in
the Gospel of John we cannot skip
to the end like we wish because when we do,
we miss out on the magic that
we encounter on the journey. (Pause)

A Lutheran pastor laid his head down
to sleep one night and dreamt of a visit
from an angel.

The pastor asked the angel in the dream,
“What will the Lord ask me when I come
to the entrance of heaven?”

The angel replied,
“It is not for me to tell you what will be asked,
but I can tell you what the Lord will NOT ask.

God will not ask,
“Why were you not like everyone else?” :-)

Today, as we wade into our assigned lessons,
we are reminded, in the gospel and
in that story about the Lutheran pastor,

that it is a human desire to be uniform.

Uni means having only one.

Form from the Latin *forma*
means shape or appearance.

“Having only one form”
is our desire to want to be...

just like everyone else,

but if Paul in the Ephesians texts
wants us to remember anything,

it is to know (or remember) that the primary call
of people is to be in unity, not uniformity.

He wrote to a congregation of Jesus followers
that thought they all had to be the same. (Pause)

This is a constant journey for us to reject
this desire for uniformity and

embrace the call for unity because
we think that in order to be in harmony
we must be the same.

Like a team with matching uniforms,
we love the appearance of uniformity,

but forget that it's God's call for humanity,
to not be the same as each other (how boring!).

And Jesus followers ought not
behave in the same ways as society behaves.

No! Paul wrote.

Be uniform with Christ.

In our diverse callings to be uniform with Jesus,
we will become united as the Body of Christ.

So, we have here a situation where
the crowd finds Jesus and wants him
to explain himself.

“When did you come here, Jesus?”

Alone, it sounds like a pretty innocuous question.

Yet, Jesus’ answer is quite convicting,
so what’s going on here?

This crowd of people, in my understanding,
was doing everything right.

They were searching for Jesus.
That’s good, right?

They were asking questions to Jesus.
Also, a good thing!

They were relying on what they
knew about God and connecting it to what
they saw in Jesus.

Check!

They knew their history,
God provided manna in the wilderness and
they knew God provided it to them
for a really long time, 40 years!

In this context, Jesus just provided them bread
and fish at the feeding of the 5,000 way up
on a mountain and they were connecting
that miracle sign to Jesus being
a prophet like Moses.

They had full bellies and their minds were
made up about Jesus!

“We want this guy to be our king and
to keep the food coming!

They were, in other words, uniform in
their interest and desire.

But they don't know what they don't know.

We know some things that the crowd
who followed Jesus that day didn't know,

but we are taking our time in this journey
because we also don't know everything

there is to know about Jesus and God, either.

This is not meant to diminish the feeding miracle.

People should not be food insecure, but
Jesus teaches that physical food is not
the main goal of his ministry or God's mission.

After they hear Jesus teach about
what is the ultimate, or most important goal,
that God will send down true bread from heaven
they will make the right request.

"Sir, give us this bread always."

It's the right request, but they don't know
it's requested for the wrong reason.

They still want to make him a political king.

And that's when Jesus drops a grand
assertion on them.

"I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me
will never be thirsty." (Pause)

How fitting it is to point out that statement today
as we celebrate Astrid's
completion of Confirmation and
welcome new members.

They, like everyone else, do not give up
their individualities and uniquenesses.

We embrace one another and wonder
how God will work anew in us,

equipping this congregation for building up
the body of Christ.

At the same time as all of this is happening,
we bid God-speed to Blake as she prepares
to depart St. Stephen, and her family,
to attend the University of West Virginia.

Even when it is hard to do,
we celebrate that Blake departs
to follow a path to further maturity.

The basket of family is always there.

God is present with her, our confirmands,
the new members, and all journeying siblings
growing up in every way,

For that is what we do... listening today and growing up in every way.

Growing up not to become uniform, no,
but to speak truth in love and to build up unity
and knowledge, leading to maturity.

“This is the work of God,” Jesus taught.

So, in closing, when we ask God
to “give us this bread always.”

We need to know what we are really asking for.

For Jesus... and for Him to lead us.

Are we having the same expectations as
the crowd?

If we are then that’s a pretty small worldview.

But, if the work of God is diversity and otherness
then we can move beyond uniformity
and befriend the uniquenesses which God
has already created.

AMEN!