**Reflection for Lent 1, 2021 - Bread of Life**

**Based on Exodus 16:4-12; John: 6:1-14**

**Prayer:**

The Lenten Road is upon us and we begin to travel with Jesus on his faithful and fateful journey to the cross. It will be a time of remembering a divine ministry where humanity was irrevocably changed. And we today continue to be changed when Jesus is our story.

 Jesus’ mortal time on earth was a great gift. His resurrection into our lives today the “Bread of Life.”

As we might prepare loaves from flour, salt, water and yeast, let it rise and bake it, the aroma entices our senses, and our mouths water. We taste the fresh warm bread and it is good, so very good. Jesus’ life and ministry offers us the same sustenance. Goodness, graciousness, empathy, and compassion rise to greet us when we recall his walk on the earth. We can taste what it is like to be loved by God.

The people of the Exodus tasted what it was like to be loved by God. ***“I’m going to rain bread from heaven for you,”*** God told Moses. God made that happen and it satisfied the groaning and complaining from the exiled. But more than that, it satisfied the doubting of the weary wanderers providing much needed hope.

God appeared to the exiled several times, and always offered some way to guide them through the wilderness. It came in prophesy, prayer, vision and word. It came through messengers. It came in many varieties and shapes of bread.

Jill J. Duffield speaks about bread from heaven in her Lenten Book, Lent in Plain Sight.

*Referring to a discussion with a friend she remarks that school supplies donated to the PTA, a parking spot close to the building on a rainy day, a job offer, rebate, or help with her kids, were all bread raining down from heaven.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Those words compel me to think of the footprints of a deer clearly visible on the carpet of fresh snow, a facetime call from a grandchild, enough money to buy groceries, a cozy bathrobe, the heat from the fireplace I turn on at the flick of a switch. ~~Sometimes we do take those things for granted.~~

I see all as, “The Bread of Life,” Manna, bread from heaven.

What are a meager Five Barley Loaves and two fish among a large and hungry crowd. Certainly, that would not suffice for the twelve disciples alone.

“Do the math,” we say, impossible we think. And absolutely it is impossible. Impossible if we consider only the message our stomachs are hearing from our brains – “feed me,” “feed me now!”

In this parable Jesus encourages us to look beyond the obvious, to look what can be accomplished with simple grace.

 **“***All we need to do is to be like the boy,” says Jill Duffield, “to bravely step forward in the middle of intimidating circumstances and offer to Jesus whatever we have on any given day. Jesus takes it from there.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Is it possible that when we do that, when we offer of ourselves what we can, that there will be enough to feed 5,000? Jesus told them, “***Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.”***

There were but five loaves, five offerings of sustenance, but this was the Bread of Life. This was not just a satisfying meal for a human appetite, it was satisfaction for a hunger for truth.

The Bread of Life came from Jesus’ presence.

It is impossible of course to know remotely what the gathered crowd on that hill with Jesus felt, but perhaps we can imagine it. The curious, hopeful, and doubting all gathered. Some would be believers already, others would be skeptical. What happened on that hill? Was the bread of life, the Holy Presence, divine love received?

I think of that time and wonder what would it be like to be in St. Peter’s square when the Pope presides over Mass? I have never been so I have no idea what one feels afterwards. What I wonder would it have been like to hear Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech? What would it have been like to be present in the crowd during President Biden’s inauguration when Amanda Gorman spoke? Were these Mana from Heaven experiences? Were these offerings of the Bread of Life? When the events concluded, were there enough fragments left over, enough wisdom expressed, enough promise shared, enough love communicated that left those gathered with a hopeful blessing? I expect we know the answer to that.

The Bread of Life is ours to receive. It is also ours to give away. And we do that in ways that would not necessarily be considered to be profound. You don’t have to be a great orator or poet, you don’t have to speak from a podium or to thousands gathered on a hillside. Giving the bread of life away is relatively simple.

Be grateful and generous of spirit. Avoid the pitfalls of letting ego gather too much momentum. Smile when the snow falls on the driveway and you don’t want to go outside to deal with it. Sing loudly like no one is listening and don’t worry about what it sounds like. Have a good belly laugh at least once a day. Listen and don’t judge. When necessary, let your heart lead your decision. And of course, pray.

In whatever way you find helpful, pray. Pray in the shower, pray on a bike ride, pray in the pool or in the hot tub, pray on your walk, pray in quiet by yourself or out loud with others. Pray and give thanks that we have this time. That is living and sharing Jesus, the Bread of Life and all that it gives us.

Let us give thanks for such bounty, The Bread of Life.

Thanks for Listening this morning,

Amen.

1. Jill J. Duffield, Lent In Plain Sight, A Devotion Through Ten Objects, p. 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)