

**Sermon - Proper 13 - Year B, 2024**  
**John 6:24-35**  
**I Am the Bread of Life**

In the name of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

For a few years, when I was serving a parish in Philadelphia, I was the lead teacher of the church Choir Camp. The youngest children, ages three or so through seven or eight, were here with us in the morning, and each day, we read together stories from the Bible about the life of Jesus. We began with Jesus' birth, and continued through the story of the child Jesus teaching in the temple. We learned together about Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus' temptation in the desert, his healings, and the Last Supper. And then, of course, the events of his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. On our final day together, I asked the kids if they had a favorite story that we had read about Jesus. Happily, everyone wanted to share. I was delighted, of course, that they all seemed to remember five solid days worth of Bible stories, but I was knocked into a sublime fit of affection when the very littlest boy had his turn. Barely three years old, a boy who had barely spoken more than a word or two for the entire week, when asked about his favorite bible story, said clearly: "the one with the BREAD and the WINE of JESUS. I love him!"

There was a bright comprehension in his eyes. This little one - still learning the most basic little demands of a human existence - this little one recognized something true and beautiful in the story of the Eucharist. Bread. Wine. Love. Indeed the entire sacramental life of the church invites us into continued encounter with this same sense of wonder. In just a few delighted words, this little boy dove right into the substance of mystery. I imagine that if you were to ask Saint Thomas Aquinas at the end of his life, what his work and theology had amounted to over the course of his holy and rigorous pursuit of God, he would've replied simply, "the bread and wine of Jesus. I love him."

What grace the Holy Eucharist is for us. What strange mystery and satisfaction. Certainly before the pandemic, I would've told you that my own vocation to serve God and to serve the Church had always been bound up with this promise of the Bread of Life. I remember my first communion - nine years old at Saint Francis Borgia Catholic Church - I remember stretching out my hands toward that host and recognizing in it the source of every good and graceful thing. I remember that minute, kneeling at the rail, receiving the Body of Christ in my own hands and knowing that I would spend the rest of my life trying to say thank you.

I've spoken before about the parish that sent me on for ordination, nearly twenty years after that first communion. About a third of our congregation was, at any given time, experiencing a form of homelessness. Somewhere around that percentage were in some form of recovery from alcohol or drug addiction. Another percentage of the congregation was a group of folks who couldn't be with us on the Sunday of the Oscars, because they were down the street at the Dolby Theater, attending the awards ceremony. And so on any given Sunday, I served as an acolyte, serving the chalice filled with the Blood of Christ to the people of God kneeling at the rail. One Sunday, I lifted the chalice toward a man who slept in our parking lot. And next to him was perhaps the most famous living composer in the world. Two men, two lives, two apparently different circumstances dictating their welcome and wellbeing in this world, and yet they knelt together: equal in dignity before the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. And when they stood up, we all saw them that way too.

Our presiding bishop Michael Curry tells the story of his parents and how they ended up becoming Episcopalians. They were Black baptists, and they attended a church in racially segregated Ohio in the early, pre-Civil Rights-movement United States. At this church, they were allowed, no questions asked, to receive the Blood of Christ from the same chalice as the white

people. In a gesture that would have scandalized much of the church at that time, this congregation *knew* the promise of that sacrament, and lived in full glory its promise of truth and homecoming and dignity.

Jesus himself articulates this truth in the Gospel of St. John: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” The events from this passage from the Gospel come to us just after Jesus has fed the five thousand people on the hillside from just a handful of loaves of bread. They are following Jesus into Capernaum because he gave them bread that satisfied their hunger. Understandably, they are hungry again, and why not accompany this miracle-working teacher to see what he might give them next? But Jesus is quick to raise their expectations. His gifts are not meant merely for satisfying physical hunger. While this is important and vital work, his true gift will soothe an even more astonishing need.

“What must we do to perform the works of God?”, the people ask. “What sign will you give us?” These are oh-so-human questions. What can I *do*? How do we *know*? What does this all *mean*? How very like this crowd we are, always demanding answers, always hoping for clarity, always consumed by our need and our hope to control.

**But there is a word that is repeated in this passage.** Maybe you caught it. The word that repeats itself in this dialogue is *give*. “The food that endures for eternal life that the Son of Man will *give you*.” “It is my father who *gives* you the true bread from heaven.” “Sir, *give* us this bread always.”

**Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, gives himself to us completely.** He gives his Body to the Cross for the sins of the whole world, and he gives his Body in the bread that continues to be broken upon every altar in every corner of the world, in every time, among every people. And

this gift is the food that endures. This sacramental life has at its source a wellspring of abundance that nothing can ever, ever sap dry.

Every one of us has spent time in our own lives working for food that perishes. We each have something that we believed would bring us happiness or safety. We try to satisfy ourselves with financial security, a good reputation, a good education. Even very good things like family or political action, or philosophy or knowledge - each one of us has some precious thing that we believe will soothe the yawning chasm of need somewhere within us. But sooner or later, no matter how much we acquire or achieve, no matter how successful or fulfilled we may be, the earthly things that surround us - even the very good things - will reach an end. There will be a point where no more money will satisfy. The pleasure in knowledge or achievement will run out, and every single thing we have prized that is not God will show itself to be food that perishes.

But there is no need to despair. **All we need do is receive the gift.** When the other things end or fall away, he is with us. When we are hungry and tired, he is with us. When we are afraid, or ill, or sleeping in the parking lot, Jesus bids us always to draw near to him, to raise our hands upward and receive him in the Bread of Life.

Amen.