

## 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2021B

A crowd of people are anxious to find Jesus after he performs the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. So, they get into boats and travel across the Sea of Galilee to the town of Capernaum. They see him there and Jesus senses what they are up to. “Very truly, I tell you, says Jesus, “you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (John 6:24-26). The people are motivated not by what they saw, but by what they ate.

“Do not work for the food that perishes,” he warns the crowd, “but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (v. 27).

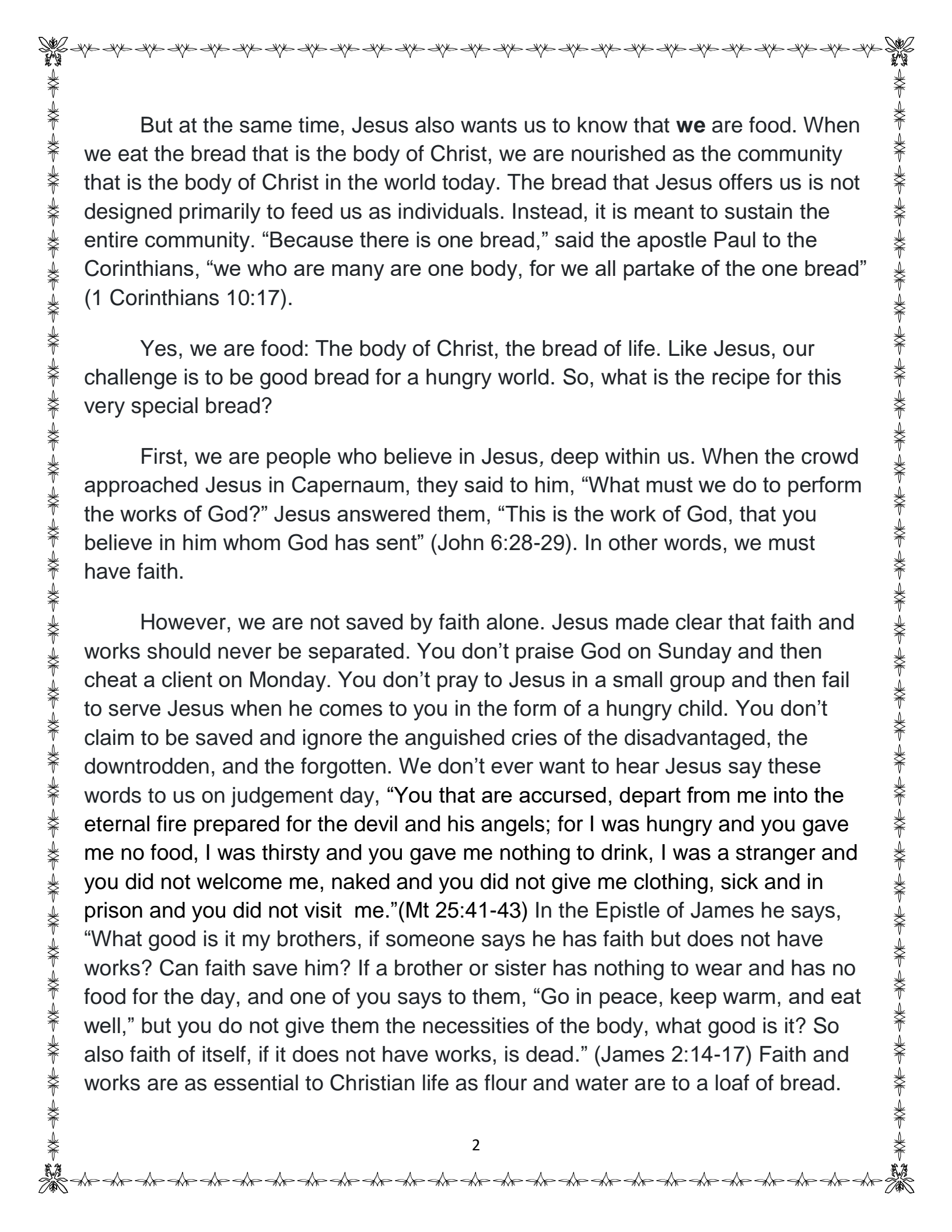
The people of Galilee remember the manna in the wilderness, which God had given their ancestors as bread from heaven. But Jesus says to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven” (vv. 31-32).

That sounds good, doesn't it? Food that endures. Bread from heaven. True bread. The people are still confused, however, so Jesus continues, “For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Such bread doesn't just taste delicious, but it actually gives life to the world. The people say to him, with excitement, “Sir, give us this bread always” (vv. 33-34).

Yes, they want this bread. But Jesus is not talking about something made of wheat, rye or corn. “I am the bread of life,” he tells them. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry” (v. 35). Jesus is presenting himself as the most basic, durable, and nutritious form of bread available to us.

“I am food,” Jesus seems to be saying. “Take me into yourself and you will never be hungry or thirsty or hopeless or powerless. I am the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to anyone in the world — including you.”

When Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” he is saying to us, “I am the food that brings you forgiveness and new life, the food that brings you to health in body, mind and spirit.” Jesus truly is “the food that endures for eternal life” (John 6: 27).



But at the same time, Jesus also wants us to know that **we** are food. When we eat the bread that is the body of Christ, we are nourished as the community that is the body of Christ in the world today. The bread that Jesus offers us is not designed primarily to feed us as individuals. Instead, it is meant to sustain the entire community. “Because there is one bread,” said the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, “we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

Yes, we are food: The body of Christ, the bread of life. Like Jesus, our challenge is to be good bread for a hungry world. So, what is the recipe for this very special bread?

First, we are people who believe in Jesus, deep within us. When the crowd approached Jesus in Capernaum, they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent” (John 6:28-29). In other words, we must have faith.

However, we are not saved by faith alone. Jesus made clear that faith and works should never be separated. You don’t praise God on Sunday and then cheat a client on Monday. You don’t pray to Jesus in a small group and then fail to serve Jesus when he comes to you in the form of a hungry child. You don’t claim to be saved and ignore the anguished cries of the disadvantaged, the downtrodden, and the forgotten. We don’t ever want to hear Jesus say these words to us on judgement day, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”(Mt 25:41-43) In the Epistle of James he says, “What good is it my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:14-17) Faith and works are as essential to Christian life as flour and water are to a loaf of bread.

Next, we are adaptable. Bread can be found in cultures all around the world, ranging from the Bolani bread of Afghanistan to the Malawach of Yemen. The nourishment of bread can be obtained almost anywhere, but it comes in a wide variety of forms. If we are going to be bread for a hungry world, we need to be adaptable as well. This means taking worship beyond the walls of the church. It requires meeting people where they are, in their pain, their disillusionment, their despair, and unbelief, and finding out what they want and need. The best ministry adaptations may still be out there, waiting for us to discover.

Finally, we are durable and nutritious, like a hardtack biscuit taken on a long hike. As the bread of life, we need to have the courage to walk into challenging situations, on the far side of our familiar places and comfortable routines. We provide real nourishment when we not only feed the homeless, but sit down with them for conversation over a meal. We provide nourishment when we meet people of different cultural backgrounds and listen to their stories, be in empathy with them and celebrate who they are.

There are those who wish to do good works as disciples of Jesus but are not able to physically able to do so. They can support, financially or otherwise, organizations and individuals that are capable of doing so.

True belief in Jesus requires acting as the body of Christ in the world. This means being adaptable, durable and nutritious, always looking for ways to nourish a hungry world. When Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," he is saying that he certainly wants to feed us. No doubt about it. But he also desires that we be good food for others.

Deacon Gerry

