

While we are away ... reflections for the Pentecost season
August 2, 2020 – 9th Sunday after Pentecost

It was not Pentecost, it was not Easter, but our outside service for the 7th Sunday after Pentecost was Spirit-filled. We look forward to the next one – Aug. 16, 2020. We continue in the 'green' season of Pentecost, following Jesus and his ministry as we think about the Spirit-led ministry of the Church. Here is Pastor Steve's message for The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost. A copy of the bulletin will be available to supplement "in-house" worship.

Lessons for Pentecost 9

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

I do not like to begin a sermon with something controversial, but today I will take a risk: German bread is better than our bread. I became convinced of this when Jean and I spent a year of study in Hamburg in the early 70's. After we returned from a year of slicing bread from hearty, robust, substantial loaves, we came back to soft, pre-sliced, packaged breads. One good thing came from this: We got our first toaster as a married couple. A visiting German friend bought us one hoping that he could rescue soft American bread with it. To be fair, we now have bakeries and bakery sections that offer us better loaves of bread. But I still believe that German bread is better than ours.

Bread is a staple in the diets of most peoples throughout the world. Our part of the world is most familiar with wheat flour bread, but bread can be made with corn or rice flour as well. Bread provides nourishment. Bread is associated with meals and eating and sustenance. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to ask, "Give us Lord our daily bread". Luther said this about that petition: *'Daily bread' includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.* Now that is bread of substance!

Jesus taught us: ask God for this daily bread, ask for all those things that sustain us. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is going to teach us about God providing our daily bread.

As the Gospel begins, eating is the furthest thing from Jesus' mind. He has heard the tragic news that John the Baptist has been brutally beheaded. He wants to retreat. He goes off to a deserted place to be by himself. He needs spiritual sustenance; he is feeling empty. But, Matthew tells us, the crowds follow Jesus. They fill that deserted place with people, people who want to be filled by Jesus' ministry.

We can feel for Jesus - we know the phone call that interrupts the nap, the crying child piercing an evening rest, the hurting friend who needs to talk when our support tank is on empty. I just need an hour to catch my breath, I just need a rest to get my bearings - but the call, the cry, the need comes a knocking, just as the crowd comes a knocking on Jesus' retreat.

Of course, we know what is going to happen - the wonderful feeding that is to come. I guess Matthew wants to make sure we know how it all begins. A tired Jesus looking for retreat. But, as Matthew will tell us, the empty, tired Jesus is filled with compassion. Jesus sees the great crowd and has compassion on them. Jesus, tired Jesus, turns his concern to others and shows his compassion is not on retreat.

As Jesus cures those in the crowd, time passes. It is now dinner time. The disciples, who could not protect Jesus from the onslaught of the crowd, try to intervene: "It's late, Jesus. This is

a deserted place, Jesus. They are all hungry, Jesus. Send them away, Jesus.” The disciples see the crowd and panic. Jesus sees the hungry crowd with compassion and encourages the disciples: “Give them something to eat.” The disciples must be thinking - wow! Jesus does need rest! He is losing it! “Jesus, we just have a few loaves and a couple fish. So, please, dismiss your idea of feeding so many and dismiss this crowd.” Jesus, tired Jesus, compassionate Jesus, will not retreat and will not let the crowd go away empty. “Bring me what you have, those 5 loaves and fish.”

Be honest: If you did not know this story, what would you think about Jesus with 5 loaves and a crowd of over 5,000? We might just be scratching our heads like the disciples.

Jesus takes the loaves, looks to heaven, blesses the loaves and breaks them. Do you suppose that Jesus might have looked to heaven and prayed, “Our Father in heaven, give us – all of us here – hungry crowd, skeptical disciples – our daily bread.” Or maybe he blessed God with the words from today’s Psalm: *The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.* We cannot be sure what he prayed, what words he used to bless the loaves, but we know that Jesus **broke the loaves**.

This was **not** an extraordinary act – people have been breaking loaves of bread from the beginning. But think about it. ***We cannot be fed from a loaf until it is broken.*** Until a loaf is broken it cannot be shared, it can not nourish, it cannot fill the hungry belly of even one person. Jesus broke through an impossible situation with a simple act – breaking bread. Then, with the disciples’ help, he provides daily bread for the entire crowd. The disciples get to see and understand the power of bread broken: “all ate and were filled”. All! And, yes, there were 12 baskets left over with broken pieces - a reminder for each disciple that when Jesus broke the bread, they were able to give each person something to eat – something they never thought was possible!

Matthew has two accounts of Jesus feeding a large crowd. In the next chapter, there is another feeding – the details vary, but the same basic account – the disciples doubt, Jesus blesses and breaks bread, the disciples feed the crowd, and again, all are satisfied and there is broken bread left over. These two wonderful acts of feeding point to Jesus' act of feeding at the end of his earthly ministry, when Jesus would again bless and break the bread with the disciples at the Last Supper. This would be Jesus’ final meal with them before he went to the Cross.

We know that meal - so well!: “In the night in which he was betrayed our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples...” These words have invited us, time and again, to the table set for us by Jesus - the Lord's Supper.

We have not been hearing these words so much recently, but listen again to Jesus' actions at the Table: he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it. We get broken bread at the Table of the Lord, blessed not just by Jesus' words, but by Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Yes, we receive Jesus' body, broken for us on the Cross. Broken so that it might be shared with each of us, all of us, whenever we gather. At this Table, we hear the words: “for you: this is bread broken for you, this is Jesus broken for you, this is Jesus coming to nourish and sustain you – take and eat and be filled.”

Two weeks ago, at our outdoor service, we celebrated the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We did not have a large loaf of German bread to break apart and share. Circumstances dictated that we use a hermetically sealed Communion kit that offered a tiny bread wafer. Like those five loaves in a deserted place, those tiny wafers hardly seemed up to the task of feeding us or filling us, but there is always a ***miracle of feeding*** at the Lord's Table. Jesus

came to us that day through a tiny wafer, a tiny fragment of bread. Jesus – broken for us on the Cross – was there to nourish us with Word and Promise – “this is my body, this is the blood of the new covenant – given and shed for you.” Luther describes the promise this way: *“Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” means that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words.*

It was a wonderful moment for those of us gathered again at St. John to share in the meal: Jesus broken and given to us. We were affirming the Psalmist words: *You open your hand, O God, satisfying the desire of every living thing.* As we shared a tiny wafer, a thimble of grape juice, we were sharing together, eating and drinking together, together taking in Jesus’ – the Bread of Life.

I want to say that we will continue to celebrate Holy Communion when we have worship outside. I am ready to bring Communion to any member that cannot make it to an outside service as safety and guidelines permit. We have ‘opened’ the Lord’s Table and we want that to be open for all. Please let me know if you would like to receive a Communion visit.

Bread is a part of our life. There are delicious breads from Germany, from other lands, from our own ovens, even from our stores, that nurture us. Our Lord's Prayer reminds us that we need our daily bread - those many things that sustain our bodies. And, whenever we hear of the *breaking of bread*, we remember our need for the Bread of Life. This is the Bread that satisfies, Jesus - given in love for us, Jesus - filled with grace and promise, Jesus - who satisfies our needs for mercy and forgiveness. Jesus offered for us.

Jesus, to whom we pray in the hymn:

*“Break now the Bread of Life, dear Lord, to us
As once you broke the loaves beside the sea.”*

Amen.