

2 Samuel 11:1-15
Psalm 14
Ephesians 3:14-21
John 6:1-21

Proper 12B
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island
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Eucharistic Living

As you know, we've been working our way through Mark's gospel for some time now, but for these next 5 Sundays, we'll be reading from the sixth chapter of John's gospel, a chapter most people call the Bread of Life Discourse, but a chapter we'll soon be calling the "Bread of life AGAIN?" chapter. We heard the very first verses of chapter 6 this morning - the stories of Jesus walking on water and feeding thousands of people with 5 barley loaves and 2 fishes. Do you know that Jesus feeding the multitudes is the only story told by all 4 gospel writers? I love this story. Actually, we get two miracle stories today. What do you make of them? Do they feel like "just stories?" Are they by now so familiar to you that you could tell them yourself? Do they matter to you? Do you believe in miracles?

I'd like to invite you to hear these miracle stories a little differently this morning, because John is telling the story today, and John tells this story in a very different way than Matthew, Mark and Luke tell it. In the other gospels, Christ's divinity is sometimes more hidden beneath the surface. But in John, when you see Jesus, you see the Father. You see God. "I am," Jesus says, and when he says that, we hear echoes of God speaking to Moses, saying "Tell the people 'I AM' sent you." "Don't be afraid. It is I" – or better translated, "Don't be afraid. I AM," Jesus says. I am the light, the door, the vine, the good shepherd, the bread... I am resurrection and I am life says the Lord. In John's gospel the dazzling light of Christ's divinity seems almost blinding, threatening to overwhelm all of the humanity Jesus also possessed. In John's gospel mostly what we get unspeakable power and mystery....

When Jesus fed those thousands of people with a couple of fish and 5 loaves of bread, God provided a banquet in the wilderness that more than satisfied all who were hungry. We're told everyone had all that they wanted and when they were through there were basketsful left over. Did it really happen? I think it did, but does that matter, compared to the miracle that God in the form of Christ Jesus has come into the world so that every hungry soul will be filled to overflowing? That our God is constantly offering the fullness of God's self, offering abundantly far more than we could ask or even imagine? That's what Jesus is showing us today - that he offers so much more than bread... he offers the fullness of himself. And he tells us we can do that too.

A very long time ago, I worked in downtown Seattle, about a mile from the ferry terminal. Every day I would walk along the waterfront, looking out over Puget Sound, back toward Bainbridge and beyond, to the Olympics. The Seattle waterfront is home to many homeless people, some of whom are very broken, living in worlds only they can experience. Because I walked along the waterfront every day, I came to recognize many of the people who lived on the street. The big,

round man with the great laugh who sold lollipops for a quarter, the far too skinny blond Viet Nam vet with the sign that said “I ain’t lyin’, I need a beer”, the proud woman whose cracked and calloused feet spilled out of her broken brown shoes, and the young woman I said hello to every day, the one who talked back only rarely, and in a language only she could understand.

Every morning and every evening, I would walk by these people, mostly just seeing them out of the corner of my eye, but sometimes really seeing them, and occasionally having the kinds of conversation that turned us human for one another. There were days when I wondered and worried and said my prayers differently because someone had gone missing for a while. That was especially true when it was that beautiful, broken young woman who spoke in her own language. I cannot tell you why I was so drawn to her, I just was. She was not drawn to me - once when I got too close to her, she let out a wail that scared the living daylights out of me. But the fright was small compared to her very large presence in my daily life. I often thought about her long after I’d passed her by. I felt like there was something to do, but I couldn’t figure out what it was. And anyway, we didn’t speak the same language...

What do you do when you want to get to know somebody? Me? I speak in the language of food. I have come to know many of you in the language of supper clubs, BBQs, tea parties, coffee in the garden and some of the loveliest dinner parties imaginable. Left to my own devices, I will always introduce myself in the language of food. I know some of you are like that too. The place you choose, the food you prepare, the ways you welcome say a great deal about you. Do you prefer fragrant, spicy, messy ethnic food, or a salad with exquisite local baby lettuces?

I know some people view food as fuel – I’m actually married to one of them - but for me, food is so much more. It is art, and science and craft and welcome and sustenance and nurture and love. You’ve seen my bumper sticker, it says *Love people, cook them tasty food!* Yes, food is my love language. There is little I love more than filling our home with the fragrance of food prepared from pure love. And once the cooking is complete, I love it best when candles are lit, prayers are offered hands are joined in blessing. We break bread, we feed one another. Bodies, minds, hearts and souls are nourished. My very favorite moments in life are those spent with people to feed and to love. I learned it from Jesus. So maybe, I thought, maybe what I need to do is to figure out how to eat with this woman. And so one evening on the way to the ferry, I stopped a few steps away from her. Quietly, shyly really, I asked her if I could buy her dinner. She looked angry. And she looked away. But she didn’t wail at me. So I went across the street to the Teriyaki Take Out place, and bought dinner for two.

The day she had wailed at me, I noticed she hadn’t many teeth, so her dinner was boneless chicken, not too spicy, but with enough heat to warm her insides for a while. I had chicken too, but mine was on the bone, fragrant, spicy and sticky. I remember that day so well. Dinners in hand, I crossed the street, approaching the woman with a shyness reminiscent of schoolgirl seeking a new friend. The woman who spoke her own language wouldn’t look at me.

Tentatively I said, *I brought you some dinner – it's chicken – not too spicy and there are no bones in it so it shouldn't hurt your mouth.* And that beautiful woman, the woman who had yelled and ranted, whose fingernails were black and brittle, whose hair was plastered to her head, whose shoes were lost, whose clothes barely covered her, whose eyes were so wild... that precious young woman turned her beautiful face to me and said "thank you" just as quietly and clearly as you would. And then she turned away and went back into her own world. In the many years that followed, she never spoke another word I understood. but we had dinner together every Wednesday night. She had the not-too-spicy boneless chicken, on the sidewalk of Alaskan Way, and I had the sticky, hot and sweet spicy chicken on the bone, riding the ferry back to Bainbridge Island.

Sometimes we think we need to know a lot of things. We think that knowledge is power and that all of those wild stories about Jesus doing all those seemingly impossible things with paralytics and lepers and feeding thousands of people and walking on water... we think we're smarter than that, and those stories can't possibly be true. But they are true. Jesus didn't just give himself for God's people. He gave himself to God's people. That was not a one-time miracle feeding event, it is Jesus showing us the truth of God's presence by pouring out God's self for us throughout his whole life, not just in his death. This is sacramental, Eucharistic living. At the last supper in John's gospel, Jesus doesn't make Eucharist with the disciples as he does in the other three gospels. In John's gospel, the last supper is marked by Jesus washing the disciple's feet, God pouring out God's own self in service, pouring out God's unbounded and abundant love. Bread is the sustenance of life, but Jesus gives so much more than bread. He gives the entirety of himself when he feeds all those people. It's really not about the bread - it's about the abundance God offers, about the abundant life God offers us.

Of course, there is abundance in every version of Jesus feeding the multitudes. But even that abundance is characterized differently in John. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, we're told the disciples fed the people and that all ate and were filled. But in John, after giving thanks to God, Jesus himself fed the people bread, fed the people fish, giving them as much as they wanted. Which, if you're anything like me, can go far beyond eating just until you're filled. Jesus not only provides, he provides all that we want. And he does that by being, and offering all that he is, fully human and filled with God's Holy Spirit.

Which means we can live like that too. Filled with God's Holy Spirit, we too can pour out our lives for the life of the world, living sacramental, Eucharistic lives. We too can live from that a place of incredible abundance, without fear that there won't be enough time, enough money, enough energy. When we recognize that we're filled with God's Holy Spirit, when we recognize the miracles all around us, when we see with the eyes of our hearts, we will see there is endless possibility, more than enough, all that we want, with baskets full left over.

All of those stories tell us the truth of how Jesus acted in the world so that we could come to understand who he really is, and who we really are. Jesus fed hungry people with real food. He came to the disciples, and he comes to us over and over again when we're lonely or when we're

afraid, offering the true comfort that comes not with certain answers, but with the simplicity of "I AM." Jesus responded to the people around him with signs and miracles and wonders, yes. But he also responds with a nurturing, steadying, constant and loving presence. Both are true, and both are miracles. Amen.