

## Sermon for Proper 13 Year B

**(RCL) 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a and Psalm 51:1-13 (Track 2: Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15 and Psalm 78:23-29); Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35**

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

A widower had some raspberry bushes. The first summer after his wife died, a woman from his church asked if she could come over and pick raspberries. She knew he and his wife had grown the bushes from the spindly young canes that came from the mail-order catalogue into thick healthy shrubs laden with fruit. “They have to be picked if you want them to keep producing,” she explained. “And I want to make you a pie. You don’t get raspberry often because it takes a whole lot of berries and you have a whole bunch of berries just waiting to be made into pie.”

She picked the berries in the morning and returned in the afternoon with the pie: homemade crust, red raspberries and filling peeking through the golden brown lattice crisscrossing the top, and still warm. “Enjoy a piece with me?” he asked. “I can’t eat an entire pie by myself.” He poured them each a glass of 2% milk and cut two pieces of the pie. It was marvelous – sweet, tart, gooey delicious fruit; flaky, tender, slightly salty crust. Perfect, especially with the milk to wash it down and clear the palate for the next bite. He thanked her for the pie.

Although the pie would have been a luxurious treat – he could certainly have enjoyed it piece by piece by himself – he got an idea. He packed up the pie and went to visit a friend. “Here, have a piece of pie,” he said. He sliced a piece and dished it onto one of the paper plates he had brought along. “I won’t stay long, but I think you will enjoy this.” They visited while the friend ate the pie, a small piece, enough to taste, but the richness of the sweet and tart and tender pie made a small piece just the right amount.

He thought next of who might actually not just enjoy a piece of the pie, but need the pie; who might need some simple pleasure, some tangible reminder that unassuming things like berries and sugar, flour and salt can be transformed into something that lets you actually taste summer in a mouthful; who might be served by this undemanding manifestation of care and love in edible form.

The pie was too good not to share. He spent the rest of the day sharing the pie, slice by modest slice. He and those with whom he shared it found that even a small piece could convey the essence of it: sunshine, earth, abundance, creativity, compassion.

He came to think of it as communion by pie.

It was a kind of grace that conveyed the knowledge that he was part of a larger community and that connection was part of what he hungered for. The pie did not cause the connection, of course. But the pie was the means for it, a way to say: “I see you. I want you to join me in enjoyment, in nourishment, in a moment set aside. Take off your work gloves, turn off your computer, set down your cell phone, check book, dish towel. Sit down for a moment and do nothing more than enjoy a piece of pie.”

Pie is not bread. A good homemade pie says indulgence in a way that most common loaves of bread do not unless one is truly hungry. But a good homemade loaf can also remind us of humble elements

transformed: flour, salt, yeast, maybe some egg to glaze the crust. The tangible and instantaneous connection with foundational processes of life: sun ripening grain, earth and rain feeding growth, human labor and creativity transforming raw materials into life-sustaining nourishment.

Attention to the ingredients connects us to a web of labor and laborers whose efforts make this food possible. We may even catch a glimpse of generations past whose ingenuity and fortitude laid the foundation for the bread before us.

We could go all the way back to ancient times, but we don't have to in order to show the preciousness and perseverance of people dependent upon bread for their daily sustenance. Immigrants packed their trunks with wheat seeds when they journeyed to the great plains of North America. Refugees sewed seeds into the hems of their skirts and their children's shirts for the voyage so the new life they longed for would be sustainable in a new home. They knew that with even a bit of bread, they could be nourished. They knew they could sustain life – planting, tending, harvesting, milling, mixing, kneading, waiting, shaping, baking, taking, giving thanks, breaking, sharing.

We meet Jesus in today's gospel just after he has fed the multitudes. After everyone has had their fill of bread. They have had the pleasure of eating enough. We know that people have pushed away from the table Jesus set for them in the wilderness feeling sated, satisfied, because according to the story, there are even leftovers.

They ate until they were satisfied. They had enough.

Funny thing about “enough.” Just what is “enough”?

The people Jesus had fed wanted a guarantee that they would always have enough. Jesus' provision of plentiful bread seemed to them something they wanted more of. So they pursued him. They thought if they could have him, they could have bread – limitless, wonderful, unending bread. Enough.

Jesus fed hungry people. He knew people need to eat. He told his followers to feed people, real, physical, tangible, nutritious food. But he also promised that he himself would be enough. He didn't want to be just a provider of physical bread. He wants to be our bread – our sustenance, our nourishment, our daily strength, our source of satisfaction.

Jesus is bread, but he wants to fill the hunger of our hearts and not just our stomachs. He wants to fill the gnawing, aching emptiness that we try to fill with lesser things, to satisfy the longing or the boredom that we use substances of all sorts to quiet, to put an end to the grasping, fretting, worrying about having enough of anything that will in the end possess us, rather than allowing ourselves to fall into the hands of the one for whom we were made.

Jesus is daily sustenance. He is bread to be savored, gathered around. Bread to inspire thanksgiving, to remind us of the wonder of life, to strengthen us. We can contemplate him thoughtfully, chewing slowly, pondering, but we will gain more if we come to him as hungry beggars, open to whatever he places in our outstretched hands.

He was taken, blessed, and broken. He is to be shared. The sharing of his life invites us to exercise the creativity of an artisan bread-baker and the compassion of a mother sewing seeds into the clothing of her children so they will always have sustenance for the journey.

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