

Soul Food
John 6:24-35
August 5, 2018 – Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

So, last Sunday we talked about Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. We talked about the faith that God will provide, that God will satisfy our every need. And today's lesson picks up right where that one left off. Indeed the crowd was satisfied. The crowd had the bellies filled; but, as we know, a full belly doesn't last very long. And so, in today's lesson, the crowd chases after Jesus, seeking more of this food. And Jesus "calls them" on it. He says, "You're looking for me, not because you are hungry for things of the Spirit, but because you ate all the food you wanted." The crowd is seeking to make the church pot-luck last forever. The crowd is seeking food for their stomachs, while Jesus is offering food for their hearts.

Now friends, far be it for me to condemn the culinary arts. My wife, Ginny, and I love to cook and we love to eat. We enjoy cooking together and we spend a lot of time cooking together. We enjoy trying new recipes. We have a very complete spice cabinet, and a sizable collection of oils and vinegars. Any food that is unfamiliar is regarded as a new adventure, as long as it's a vegetable. (No, I'm not going to get into the Vegetarian vs. Carnivore thing. That's a discussion for another time and place.) But suffice to say, I consider food, good food, tasty food, natural food, to be a gift from God; just as I consider fine music and art and even nature to be a gift from God. But it's still just food for the stomach. Yes, it's important to properly nourish the body, as we enjoy good food. Proper nourishment gives us the strength to do the work to which God calls us. Proper nourishment allows us to properly care for the greatest earthly gift that God has given us – our very bodies. But, it's still just food for the stomach.

Jesus offers food for the heart. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." This bread (*hold up Bible*) happens on a higher level, and this bread (*jester to the Communion Table*) happens on a higher level. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Friends, I said it before. I said it at Pentecost; and I reminded our Youth Mission Team of it. We have a constant companion in the Spirit of the Living Christ. I believe, as much as I believe anything, that Christ is always with us, leading us, guiding us, giving us strength, and most importantly, giving us love. How can we never be hungry? How can we never be thirsty? No, we're not talking about things of the stomach. But if we know, if we truly believe that Christ is with us, our spirits will never be wanting.

I've entitled this sermon "soul food"; and I'm not speaking of black-eyed peas and collard greens. I'm speaking of food for the human soul, food that feeds

the spirit, food that will never end. One of the commentators I read suggested that, all too often we invite people into our churches for all the wrong reasons. We invite people in for the “right” kind of worship or for political engagement on behalf of the poor or oppressed. We invite people in for the sake of a “Christian America.” We invite people in to build a strong youth program or children’s program or family ministry. We invite people in to participate in Bible Study or our music ministry. We invite people in to practice mission, a food ministry or a Youth Mission Trip.¹ Now, I’m not going to tell you we that we should not offer these things. I have often preached about the importance of some of these things. But these things are not the bread of life. They may be ways to experiencing the bread of life. They may be ways of sharing the bread of life. But ultimately, as Disciples of Jesus Christ, our only job is to experience and to share the amazing love of God, as expressed in the person of Jesus Christ. The love of God – that’s the bread of life, that’s the food for the soul. All the other things are simply paths to the bread.

Friends, I pray that every time you enter this place, you sense the love of God. I pray that every time you reach out to help someone, to serve someone, to share with someone in the name of Christ, you experience the love God. I pray that every time you pray, you feel the love of God. I pray that every time you just sit quietly and think, you experience the love of God. I pray that you will have the sense of God’s love enveloping you. I like that verb – envelop. You know the way an envelope wraps around a letter to protect it and to get it where it’s going? I pray that the love of God will so wrap around you, to protect you, to care for you, to get you where you are going.

You know that most famous verse of the Bible – John 3:16 – Say it with me: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that who so ever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” And here, three chapters later we read: “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. . . I am the bread of life.”

As we dine on this bread and this cup today, may we truly experience the bread of life, as we are truly enveloped in the loving arms of the ever present Spirit of the living Christ. Amen.

¹ O. Benjamin Sparks, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 3, 310.