1 August 2021 Proper 18.B

We’re in the centre of three weeks where the Gospel of John holds us with crowds who followed Jesus after the feeding of “thousands.” It is a one of the ‘pillars’ of this Gospel.

There are layers to the “Bread of Life” passage. Some have to do with authority: who has greater authority, Jesus or Moses? Part of that discussion has to do with bread and manna, *where* they come from and *who* they come from, leading to Jesus’ teaching about a greater bread, the “Bread of Life.” Another layer is *what* they are, signs, or something else (?). And the word “work” also bounces around, beginning with Jesus saying, “Do not work for bread that perishes…” which gets turned into the crowd’s question, “What must we do to perform the works of Gd?”

We could get tangled up in these verses alone, like a swimmer in seaweed.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, the writer moves from the rapturous praise of last week to the next step, where praise lifts us up, and parenesis – that is, teaching – puts our feet firmly on the ground. From blessing to praise to living for Christ, and one another and the world.

Bread of life on the one hand, the ministry of the church on the other.

The gifts of Gd, on the one hand, and Gd’s gifts to the church on the other.

The works of Gd.

So we step back: What does the Word behind the words have to share with us this morning? What is the Spirit whispering to Gd’s people?

Jesus is the Bread of life sent by the Holy One for the world.

Christ Jesus sends his friends, his church, to the world to carry on the works of Gd that were his, for the life of the world,

* for the life of our neighbourhood
* for the life of the planet
* for the life of refugees
* for the life of the hungry
* for the life of all kinds of people

The Bread of Life feeds us, the Spirit of Christ gives us gifts and we are given, we are sent, to continue the Mission of Gd.

To go further, I’d like to share with you some of the content of the US Episcopal Church’s Catechism, a document that was very important for me in my teens when I was growing in my understanding of the church. I still find it useful for exploring questions of believing and living the Christian life. There used to be a Catechism in the back of the BCP – but there isn’t one in our current edition, nor in the BAS.

**What is the mission of the Church?**

The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

**How does the Church pursue its mission?**

The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

**Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?**

The church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

**What is the duty of all Christians?**

The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

**Who are the ministers of the Church?**

The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

*From the Catechism of the Episcopal Church (USA)*

The people pursuing Jesus wanted more bread – to save money, to free up time, to save themselves from the labour – we don’t really know why except that they wanted more and Jesus wanted them – and us – to understand that there is something of far greater importance we need to feed on. We understand that to be the Bread of Life, the teaching and ministry, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and we understand Gd can use anything to feed us, and we expect to fed as Gd encounters us through the vehicle of Scripture and holy communion.

We are fed so that Gd might use us for others.

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We are not alone, we have one another.

We are not alone, the Holy One is our companion day and night, like a ‘pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night” as Exodus puts is, and as the Gospel says, as Gd dwells in Christ and Christ dwells in us, and as Gd send us the Holy Spirit.

We are equipped – Gd sends us the Spirit and the Spirit shares gifts for ministry among us, and the story of Gd’s presence with Israel and with Jesus and the young churches continues to be a source of inspiration and challenge.

Another piece of the Catechism:

**What is the ministry of the laity?**

The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church;

* to bear witness to him wherever they may be;
* and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world;
* Gd gives us the Bread of Life that we may feed on Christ Jesus, and he may dwell in us.
* Gd gives us the Spirit to teach us, equip us, sustain and empower us for the work of Gd for the world
* And Gd gives us the ministry of reconciliation – healing, peacemaking, community making, life sustaining – so that heaven and earth are reconciled and full of Gd’s glory.

I think it is more important now than ever that the members of the church understand this. Our Anglican Church in Canada has put it to us not in a catechism but in the words of the Baptismal Covenant and the Marks of Mission. These words aren’t about the institution but about the people, the members of Christ’s body. They are for teaching us who we are and what we are called to do AND they are for us to know so that we can speak clearly, in our living, doing and being, because they have helped us to understand.

I believe now more than ever that it is in the lives of the members of congregations, lives outside the walls of the church, that people will come into contact with the treasure the church has held for thousands of years. In 2nd Corinthians Paul writes so clearly, and sung so beautifully in a hymn, “We have a treasure not made of gold, in earthen vessels life untold. One treasure only, the Lord the Christ, in earthen vessels.”

We, earthen vessels, the treasure and light, Christ Jesus. Here heaven and earth are full of God’s glory. Amen.

(And you thought this would be about bread.)