

**Lectionary 19 / Proper 14B**  
**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**Lakeland, FL**  
**August 8, 2021**

**I Kings 19:4-8**  
**Psalm 34:1-8**  
**Ephesians 4:26-5:2**  
**John 6:35-51**

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Once again, we are considering today Jesus' bold announcement -- "I AM the Bread of Life." Two weeks ago we saw the abundance that Jesus provides as he fed perhaps fifteen thousand people from a meager two fish and five barley loaves offered by a young boy. The crowd had their fill and twelve harvest baskets remained. Unimaginable abundance.

Last week, the crowd continued to seek Jesus—the one who had fed them in their hunger, the one who made seemingly audacious claims about himself, the one who is the bread that came down from heaven. We thought about the hope we have because the bread of life is offered to us. And with the crowd we say, "Sir, give us this bread always." We considered what it is for which we truly hunger.

And in today's gospel, we hear Jesus' words through the lens of relationships. The religious leaders. The crowd. The Father and Jesus. We witness some of the responses to Jesus, the bread of life. Some were skeptical – isn't this Joseph's boy? Who is he to be talking like this? Bread came down from heaven? What does this even mean? Wasn't that just "manna?" And you can see them shaking their heads at how preposterous this seemed. And the religious leaders heard those audacious claims and began to murmur and complain – just as their forebears had in the wilderness. Not a very welcome response to the one who fed them, was it?

And Jesus speaks even more enigmatically about the relationship between him and the Father – I have come to do the will of the one who sent me. And, "this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all the Father has given me." And I can't help but wonder about how all of this is heard and seen by the disciples and how this is shaping their relationship with Jesus and with each other. Relationships.

What does it mean that Jesus is the Bread of Life? Of course, there is the Eucharistic understanding of this; that when we commune we are actually receiving Jesus in a mysterious way that we cannot understand. And we'll talk more about that next week. This week, however, I want us to consider this question that one of the commentators asked. What does it mean in our everyday lives to feed on the Bread of Life. How does this shape how we who are followers of Jesus then live? How do we feed on Jesus every day?

We feed on Jesus every day and we build our relationship with him everyday when we engage in various spiritual practices – practices such as Bible study and devotional reading, daily prayer and meditation, regular worship, careful and meaningful conversations with each other. Each of these draw us closer to God. How does this work?

When we want to build a relationship with a friend, we spend time together. We speak honestly to them, daring to share tender parts of ourselves with them because trust is being built. We consider who they are, the events and characteristics that make them the person they are. We look for ways to connect with them. We spend time with them, sometimes doing something they

want to do even if it doesn't interest us very much. In all of these ways, we grow in our relationship with them. It's like that with God too.

And so it is, that as we pray, we communicate with God speaking our truth, our needs, our hurts, our joys to God. But not only that. Part of prayer is sitting in quiet meditation to listen for God. Just as Elijah heard God not in the fire or the earthquake or the wind but rather in the sound of sheer silence, so too, we can experience God in the quietness of our hearts, in the stillness of our lives.

And as we get to know another person, we listen to the stories of their lives. The excitement they had as they began a new job even if it was decades ago. The delight they had as they began their marriage or became parents. The fear they had as they set off on a cross-country move. By hearing these stories, we build links with them, touchstones that help us to see them and understand them in a new light.

And so it is that as we read the Holy Scriptures and hear the stories of God in relationship with God's people. We hear about what it is that God has done in the past, the persistent faithfulness of God to God's people. The love of God poured out in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. In this we learn to see more clearly how God is showing up in our lives individually and collectively even today. And we hear the promises of God for the future – God's intention to redeem the world, that is the whole cosmos, to bring it into alignment with God's perfect intention for all God has created.

And, I believe that fundamental to our relationship with God is our relationship with each other, both those within the community of faith and those outside the community of faith. We build these relationships in the ways we have just discussed – time with each other, sharing life stories with each other. Talking and listening. And worshiping together and gathering at the Table together as we are the baptized of God.

This may come as a surprise to you, but there are times that even pastors and priests may not feel like coming to church. Times when we too feel like our faith is challenged and maybe even small. That is when it is most important to gather together for worship. You see, we are created for relationship. We are created to be with each other. And there are times when the faith of those around me, those who join with me in the words of the Apostles' Creed actually builds my faith, a faith that may be weak for the same reasons that yours may be weak at any time.

The gospel-writer promised those who live in relationship with this one who is the Bread of Heaven will have eternal life. Now, this eternal life is not simply a life insurance policy for what happens after our death. No, because of the incarnational life of Jesus, a life frankly, that changed the course of history, a life by which God who is beyond all time actually entered into the time of this earth. The eternal life into which we are called is fundamentally different from the life away from the Bread of Heaven. And it is a life eternal that we have right now, not merely a promise for the future.

And this life eternal that we are living right now is marked by many things. It is marked by love for one another, now. It is marked by hope now that does not disappoint. It is marked by a present faith that looks beyond all that we have done, both for good or for ill. It is marked by a life well-lived together. Now. On this side of eternity.

The second reading today is from Ephesians, a letter to the Christians in Ephesus that is full of exhortations to unity in this lived lived together. A unity that surpasses conformity. Not cookie

cutter lives. But a unity that is born of life in the Holy Spirit. A unity that is seen as we speak truthfully and lovingly to one another. A unity that is seen as we do not give in to the temptations that come with anger. A unity that seeks to build up the community of faith rather than acting out of one's own interests. A unity that calls us to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgives us. The eternal life in which we are now living because we are the baptized children of God, walking wet in our baptismal waters every single day.

Recently I have written of it in this way from the words in Ephesians:

Beloved in the Lord  
Walk according to the high calling on your life  
Walk with humility and gentleness  
With patience  
Bearing with one another in love  
Strive for the unity that comes from the Spirit  
Live within the bonds of peace

There is one body and one Spirit  
You are called to the one hope that belongs to your call  
One Lord, one faith, one baptism  
One God of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Live fully in the grace given to each of us. This is eternal life.  
Now and forever.

Amen.