

Harvest Thanksgiving 2022

“Jesus said, ‘Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.’” (St. John 6.27)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In last week’s Gospel Jesus asked, “Is not the life more than meat?” One translation make this question into a statement: “Surely life is more than food.” No doubt we could have quite a long discussion about that. On the one hand, life *is* more than the food we eat; on the other hand, without it, we will starve to death. But the Lord Jesus was not disputing that we need food to live. He was addressing our tendency to worry. We are prone to worry! It is a daily struggle to trust that the Lord will provide what we need, when we need it. So, Jesus used two simple illustrations about God’s faithfulness. “Look at the little birds,” He said. “They do not plant seeds, nor do they gather food for the winter, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better – much more important -- than they?” Then He went on to speak of the flowers: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet...even King Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these....If God so clothe the grass of the field, which is here today (and gone tomorrow) shall He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”

So through that one, simple question, the Lord shows how perfectly He understands us. “Is not life more than food?” His intention is to help us look beyond material things to what is eternal. He knows all about the uncertainties we face as mere mortals, and the worries that go with them: having enough money to live; rising food costs; rising rents; new and intense weather patterns; not to mention the unpredictabilities of global politics. He knows all of that and wants to help us focus on what is strong and solid.

That is exactly the point of this morning’s Gospel. It comes from the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John – the same chapter which records how Jesus miraculously fed the five thousand. In this morning’s reading, it is the next day, and the people from that crowd have followed Jesus because they want to be fed again. Jesus knew that, of course, and in response He said, “In very truth I know that you have not come looking for Me because you saw signs (miracles) but

because you ate the bread and your hunger was satisfied.” Then, He went on, “You must work not for this perishable food, but for the food that lasts, the food of eternal life”. In the Prayer Book, the translation on page 621 says, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man will give unto you”.

The people who are there pick up on the word ‘labour’ or ‘work’, and they ask, “What shall we do that we might work the works of God?”...That is, “What must we do if we are to work as God would have us work?”... “This is the work that God requires,” Jesus said “believe in the One Whom He has sent”. He then went on to identify Himself as the One sent by God: “I am the Bread of Life,” He told them. “He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.”

Interestingly, Jesus used the word “never”. Whoever comes to Him and believes in Him and truly trusts Him – with their life – will *never* hunger or thirst. What does that mean? How can He say “never”? One commentator made this helpful point: “when we come to the Lord, we must not come as the people who pursued Him for food; rather, we must come believing in Him as the Giver of the True Bread – as the Bread of Life Himself”.

That’s the thing: we have so much, to the extent that it is hard for us to come to God, believing that we truly need Him – that our life absolutely and completely depends on Him. Think of it: here we are at the beginning of this Harvest Thanksgiving festival, with an abundance of food which the Lord has once again supplied. As we say, ‘We live in one of the best – if not the best – countries in the world. And yet, the food that has grown has not been supplied by our ingenuity. The seed that was planted, grew through the sunshine and rain supplied by God.

And so, Jesus challenges us this morning: think about the foundation of your life. What gives you peace? What brings you joy? In what do you find purpose and hope? To help us in this reflection last week’s Gospel brought us this question: “Is not the life more than food?” And this week, we have the answer reinforced in Jesus’ words: “Labour not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life.”

In the wake of Hurricanes Fiona and Ian; and with everything else going on in the world: the devastating floods in Pakistan and South Sudan, the continuing war in

Ukraine and Russia's threats of nuclear weapons, we would be foolish to work for material things. Instead, let us seek what is eternal. As the children of our Heavenly Father, let us seek first and above everything else, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, trusting that He will supply all that we need to live.

Every time the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, we are reminded of what is most important, and of what we should do. Front and center in the Church is the Lord's Table. Without any words, it says, "Remember what God has done for you in Christ Jesus. Remember how He bore your sins in His own Body on the Cross. Remember that He shed His Blood for you there, and died. Remember that He rose again to defeat all the powers of death and hell – for you. Remember that He has sent His Spirit to live in you, and that through Him you have new life – eternal life."

In response, Christians go forward, as they are able, and kneel with their hands outstretched. In doing so, we say, "I need you. I am empty. Please feed me with the Bread of Life. Help me. Forgive me. Strengthen me. Heal me. Show me what is eternal."

A closing word from Bishop Tom Wright: "Until we recognize who Jesus really is, we may be fed with all kinds of food – and delicious meals – but there will be a deep hunger inside which will never be satisfied."

"I am the Bread of life," Jesus said. "Whoever comes to Me will never hunger and whoever believes on Me shall never thirst."

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...