



## Sermon for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene      The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33](#)

[Ephesians 4:25-5:2](#)

[John 6:35, 41-51](#)

We continue our exploration and examination of power – and the powers of this world, and the power of God that can transform life as we know it.

In a world where power is often abused – God gives us the power to speak the truth with wise and courageous love (Just as Nathan spoke to David who abused his power).

In a world of usurpers, where power is seized and control is taken, where everything can become a contest for “winner take all” – God’s power breaks into the world through loving our enemies, through forgiving (Just as David sought to forgive and restore relationship with Absalom his own son who usurped his throne and sought to kill him).

In a world where alliances are valued so highly, that being “right” and being on “the right side” takes over people’s minds and divides the world into “us and them” – God brings the wall-breaking power of raw self-offering as we find in Jesus.

God has not neglected this world. God has not neglected you, or me. God does not desire to rule anyone out or turn anyone away. With every person, every people, every nation, God desires that no one be lost, that everyone find the Light, the Truth, the Way, the Door, the Bread of Heaven, that every single one be raised up in the end.

There are words of Jesus in this ongoing portion of the Gospel John we are hearing over these weeks about the Bread of Life, words we don’t hear in today’s selected section of the Gospel, that are incredibly important. Let me read these for you – because I think these words really get at the heart of what Jesus was trying to get across to the crowd and the religious leaders and his own disciples. Let’s fill in the gap with the verses we didn’t hear today:

*John 6:35 Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. <sup>36</sup> But I told you that you have seen me and still don’t believe.*

*<sup>37</sup> **Everyone whom the Father gives to me will come to me, and I won’t send away anyone who comes to me. <sup>38</sup> I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me.***

*<sup>39</sup> **This is the will of the one who sent me, that I won’t lose anything he has given me, but I will raise it up at the last day. <sup>40</sup> This is my Father’s will: that all who see the Son and believe in him will have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”***

*<sup>41</sup> The Jewish opposition grumbled about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”*

Now, note where Jesus goes. He begins by saying, “I am the bread of life,” inviting all to take in what he is offering like nourishment in their deepest and inmost parts. But then he goes on to say what is most

important: "I won't send away anyone who comes to me – I won't lose anything or anyone the Father has given me, and I will raise them up on the last day." "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry or thirsty, will never be lost, will always be in my embrace – whoever takes me in will have me always, bringing nourishment and growth and life and change they never imagined."

This is what Jesus is offering – the complete embrace of God the Giver of Life, the promise that what God most desires is that no one be lost, and the assurance that he brings us into full and unending joyful relationship with God.

It is when we allow ourselves to open up fully to Christ Jesus, when we take Christ in and allow Christ to be our food and drink, our nourishment in every fiber of our being – it is then when we can truly and freely live in the power of the Holy Spirit and move through this world as the images of God we were created to be, as offerors and ambassadors of God's amazing grace.

In the Gospel of John, there is no final "Lord's Supper" where bread and wine are shared at the last Passover meal before his capture, trial, and death. At that Passover meal in John, we have Jesus washing the disciples feet. But it's really here, in John, that we have the Eucharist – in the feeding of the five thousand and in all of Jesus' further invitation to see him as the Bread of Heaven, the Bread of Life. It is here, in John, that we get a picture of how God is continuing and spreading the incarnation through us – how Jesus Christ, God incarnate, God in-the-flesh, extends this miraculous presence to us in the food shared.

From this infusion of God incarnate, God-with-us intimately, we are empowered to live as Paul calls us in his letter to the Ephesians – to speak the truth, to work honestly and seek to have something to share with those in need, to use our anger well for the sake of truth and justice and care and then to let it go, to speak in a way that builds up others and the communities we encounter, to let ourselves become the Holy Spirit's vessels of kindness and tenderheartedness, to forgive in the same fulness that Christ forgave us.

It may not seem possible. It may seem that the challenges and injustices of life prevent us from living such lives of grace. But then, are we saying that the challenges and injustices of life that we encounter can actually prevent and block the incredible, life-changing power of the Holy Spirit? Are we really saying that?

King David found himself in a complete mess. One of his sons, the son of a wife who was princess of a small neighboring kingdom, had risen up to usurp his kingdom. Like in so many of the ancient kingdoms and empires, sons rose up to overthrow their fathers – and this became part of the stories of the ancient gods as well, so that it was accepted as a part of the natural flow of power in this human world. There is quite a story leading up to Absalom's seductive rise to power and his abuse of power, and his own story is tragic.

David could have mustered an army immediately to overthrow Absalom. But he withdrew from Jerusalem and fled with his soldiers and followers into the desert. When Absalom finally mustered a large force to go and kill him, David and his followers successfully engaged battle and won the day – and, according to the scriptures, many more of Absalom's soldiers mysteriously perished in the forest than on the battlefield. David had ordered Joab, his commander, not to do any harm to his son. He still loved him and did not want him to be lost. But Joab found Absalom caught by the head in a tree, and against the will of

the king ran him through the heart with three spears. When David found out, he was brokenhearted. He wept for his son. Joab was angry that David wept, because it left his soldiers confused (and actually, because it brought appropriate shame on Joab). But David showed mercy. David was ready to lead with love – even for the one who had betrayed him and sought to kill him. Imagine! Weeping and praying as David did, “Would to God I had died in your place, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

This love that David showed for Absalom is just one taste of what it means to pour out our hearts for others and the world around us. This is the kind love God has for each and every one of us, for all humanity and all creation. We read and hear this cry of David and hear in it the sorrowing cry of God who seeks us, yearns for us, desires our life and opens the door for us no matter what we have done. This is God’s cry: “Oh, would that I had died for you.” And this is just what God has done for us all.

Friends, let us open ourselves to receive this Jesus, this One who is God in-the-flesh. Let us open ourselves to take Jesus in, to nurture and strengthen and transform us in every fiber of our being. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to blow like steady wind through us and carry us wherever God wishes us to go. Let us allow Christ to be Bread for us, and ourselves to be that same intimate, loving, powerful presence of God to others, as offerors and ambassadors of the Lord of Life who lives in us, for the sake of this hungry world.