



Sermon for Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

Psalms 51:1-13

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of *your* faithful and *kindle* in us the fire of *your* love.

Who or what gives us nourishment? What is life? What is truth? How is this eternal?

Jesus is the bread of life who nourishes us to be loaves of life to others. Including forgiveness, reconciliation, love that binds us, love that brings us together.

Where does this leave us at this time, given our lives, and the challenging world in which we live? To nourish ourselves we need bread (food). However, my research doesn't even blow dust off the surface. The Rev Canon Peterson, preaching in the National Cathedral points out that we have "a God who is so intimately involved that He is even concerned about the bread that people eat as well as the bread for one's spiritual existence." Then this Jesus "...presents to us God's nature in the most concrete form, that of bread."! In today's Gospel "we are challenged because we are called to action, not only in our personal lives, but also as we reach out to the local and global community in which we live." ¹ Talk about a tough tall order and an awesome responsibility.

In today's readings, it seemed that King David had it all, but that still wasn't enough. Once Nathan pointed out his behavior, David, probably in serious shock and horror, realized that he "had sinned against the Lord."

Then Paul, whilst in prison pointed out that each of us is given grace, according to the measure of Christ's gift. Just think of the amazing diversity of gifts that each of us have. Each is gifted in so many excitingly different ways and this provides the basis of such a rich interwoven fabric of interaction, faith and opportunity for service.

We have the knowledge, capability and strength of faith to break down the walls of hostilities between us. This surely fills us with hope! There is hope.

After feeding the 5,000, Jesus takes off for a break. We see Him as human – tired and headed off to Capernaum, and yet when asked, he speaks about the loving message he brings to all mankind. When we are tired, likely irritable and a bit frustrated, do we have that same patient capacity to speak calmly and respectfully with others? Jesus simply set a superb example didn't he.

"There is a Hasidic Jewish saying. "The world is full of wonders and miracles, but we take our little hands and cover our little eyes and see nothing." ²

To whom of us does this saying apply? Are we scared to open our eyes and look honestly at the world around us and have God take us by the hand to do his works? In today's Gospel, Jesus pointed out that their bellies were full, but that he was sent to fill a deeper hunger. We are fed during the Eucharist so "that we might go out into the world and feed others." So, what are we so scared of? We can do it.

Author Eugene Peterson wrote directly: "Don't bicker among yourselves, you're not in charge here. The God who sent me (Jesus) is in charge. God draws people to me—that's the only way you'll ever come. Only then do I do my work, putting people together, setting them on their feet and meeting their deepest needs, not just filling their stomachs."³

There's a wonderful book, *The Book of Joy* that captures a weeklong conversation between Nobel Peace Laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and the His Holiness the Dalai Lama about the nature of joy and how to cultivate *it regardless of our circumstances*. *Regardless of our circumstances*.

The archbishop's basic guiding insight was the Imago Dei – the imprint of God in us all. All human beings reflect God's glory, all of them. Tutu's activism against evil such as apartheid was rooted in theology, not politics. To him, apartheid was simply a failure to see God in others, even if others look different or are different. And he also considered this applied to the oppressors as well! He espoused the idea of Ubuntu – the idea that "I am because you are." Through God's presence within all of us, we are all brothers and sisters.⁴

In the *Book of Joy*, the Dalai Lama recounts a story about a fellow Tibetan monk.

"After the Chinese invasion in 1950, the Dalai Lama went into exile in India, but this monk was not able to escape. Instead, he was imprisoned in a forced-labor camp for nearly 20 years where he endured almost unimaginable deprivation and torture. He was eventually freed, and when he reunited with the Dalai Lama, he told him that he had been at great risk during those years of torment. "I thought, of course, he was talking about dangers to his life," the Dalai Lama recounted. "He told me he was in danger of losing...*his compassion for his Chinese guards*."⁵ Seriously? Webster's Desk Dictionary defines compassion as "a feeling of deep sympathy for another's suffering or misfortune."

I was simply blown away by that story. I've read it three times this past week. Can any of us imagine enduring horrible deprivations for years and to come out worrying about losing compassion for your captors? The power of forgiveness comes through.

You may recall, there was another angry man who felt a great injustice was done as he was sentenced to life in prison. Released after 27 years, he came out ready to forgive those who put him there. He stood firm and tall, espoused compassion for his captors and he united a country. A unity that lasted for 10 years in which everyone prospered. Nelson Mandela. One of his quotes: "Our human compassion binds us the one to the other - not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future." Look towards hope for the future!! What kind of strength

does someone like that have and how much faith in our Lord to make it happen? The power of forgiveness, which is not a sentimental touchy-feely emotion, it is tough minded determination to recognize our own humanity is bound up with others. Ubuntu.

Fr. Shobe in the Diocese of Dallas, TX points out: "...praying for someone does not mean you like what they do. But it is one of the supreme callings of all who follow Christ to pray with love even for those who seem like our "enemies" – to pray for God's compassion for them. And to pray that we never lose our compassion for them, either. "

Here's a real-life example of how we might think before reacting. How many of you are aware of the nasty situation reported at Manchester airport a few days back, in which a police officer reportedly beat a suspect. It became an almost immediate social media feeding frenzy with people weighing in about bad police behavior, versus those supporting the police. However, one calm head prevailed through all of this, the Mayor of the City of Manchester. The wise thing to do is wait until all the information is in. This goes against social media and the way we all get much of our political and social news and other information these days. We could wait awhile for facts to emerge, or better yet, leave the decisions and actions to those better qualified!

It seems there are two ways of doing this. On one hand we overreact, demanding we all see the bodycam footage and the CCTV footage so that a million people can cut and paste bits that suit our cause or parts they find exciting.

"Or, on the other, we could let those who have a bit more experience than Internet experts of actual policing and, what's more, have powers to interview witnesses and access police disciplinary records – to conduct a patient and thorough investigation into what happened and draw a measured conclusion."⁶ It does mean having some patience.

So, how do we pray for those who frustrate us? Maybe we don't like what someone says or represents. What, you want me to stay calm and not in my excitement give vent to my feelings? I guess we cannot have it all our own way, can we? We are being taught and led to praying for all, our leaders, those we disagree with, even that mean and nasty neighbor across the street from us or that crazy, aggressive driver weaving in and out on the 90. Maybe he was rushing to an emergency at the Kootenai hospital – you simply don't know. We should pray for what is right, not who is right. And we have to be honest with ourselves, and this can be a tough and often painful thing to do!! Let's add a bit of humility and humor to this. Humility allows us to celebrate the gifts of others.⁴ Taking this further, when we have humility, we can laugh at ourselves. Of course, there are serious and profound conversations, but genuine laughter has an extraordinary power to simply make people feel better, even when dealing with issues that could be a source of anguish!⁴

Let the words of our own Bishop Gretchen help guide us, in her Pastoral letter of July 16: "We are called to be united in offering compassion, seeking understanding, standing in mercy, showing forgiveness. We are called to be united in respecting dignity, seeing Christ in the face of the other, serving all. A divided

country needs a united Church that understands that followers of Jesus might disagree with one another about how to address issues facing us, but that disagreement does not diminish the humanity of the other.”⁷

We have the means! Through Baptism, God’s promise to be with us forever. The Eucharist, each time we come to the Table we are promised nothing less than forgiveness, acceptance, wholeness, that is life, now and forever. Scripture and Prayer remind us, help teach us and guide us. Forgiveness and acceptance, like love and respect, can only be given as a gift from one person to another. We earn our gift of Grace. Let’s add a little humility and humor wherever we find ourselves, it should go a long way to helping us communicate more honestly and compassionately with each other.

Have Faith! We’ve earned Grace to make our world better! The place God calls us to is the place where our deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.⁸

We can do it. Amen

References:

- 1) Rev Canon John L Peterson, August 9, 2009, preaching in the National Cathedral
- 2) Canon Howard Anderson, back on August 13, 2006, in the “Flight from Intimacy”
- 3) Author Eugene Peterson “The Message Bible”
- 4) Fraser, Giles; Desmond Tutu’s divine egotism; December 28, 2021
- 5) The Book of Joy, Lasting Happiness in a Changing World; Nobel Peace Laureates Archbishop Tutu and the Dalai Lama, with Douglas Abrams. Random House 2016
- 6) Sam Leith, Spectator.com: What the Manchester incident didn’t teach us.
- 7) Bishop Gretchen Pastoral letter, July 16, 2024
- 8) Frederick Buechner, featured in: Healing Quotes