

Jesus, the Bread of Life

Pentecost 10B · John 6:24-35

Grace and peace to you from the Father through our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

From last week till next week, we would hear Gospel stories heavily related to eating food. Because the context for these three Sunday's reading in John's Gospel is "the Jewish Passover festival is near" (6:4). Passover is a major event of commemorating the Israelite's history of being saved by God from the slavery in Egypt. It associates with eating – eating lamb and unleavened bread. But it is more than eating, it is ultimately about faith of God's people believing in God's deliverance or saving power.

Last week we heard the story that Jesus feeds more than five thousand people in a miraculous way of just using five small bread and two small fish. Today, the same crowd had further interaction with Jesus - still talking on the topic of eating but with more focus on who Jesus is. Out of the blue, Jesus once again amazed them with his self-revealed declaration – "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Let us pray: Lord God, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

Suddenly we are in Lockdown again. From the TV news we see people line up in supper market with full trolley of food and other groceries. Yes, stocking of enough food might bring some people a sense of security. But that kind of security is mainly for their belly – the basic human need. Ironically, like two sides of a coin, from the same action we can see their lack of sense of security spiritually - the lack of peace of mind in believing God's protection and provision.

They are not alone. The same crowd fed with bread and fish chased up Jesus and would force him to be their king so that they can have security in a long run for their belly. Jesus knew their thought and said to them, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” To grasp whatever things or people to secure the access to enough food has been a common objective for many people from ancient time until now, the Covid pandemic.

It is not necessarily wrong, but definitely not good enough for us the Christians. For Jesus continued his teaching to the crowd, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” Jesus points his teaching to a spiritual realm of eternal life.

Then the crowd introduces the story of manna, which becomes the central image of Jesus’ identity as “bread of life” in today’s Gospel. They ask Jesus to perform a sign like Moses did when God provided the Israelites with a miraculous food in the desert. It is ironic that the crowd doesn’t already associate Jesus with Moses. This is part of the same group of people Jesus fed on the mountainside with a miraculous meal. Even though the crowd acclaimed Jesus as prophet and sought to make him king (6:14-15), they seem not to have really understood the significance of what happened in the feeding miracle (6:1-14).

Now the crowd asks Jesus for a sign like Moses did (6:31). It seems strange for them to say this, since Jesus has just performed a sign like the one they require. Yet their words also confirm what Jesus has said. They have not “seen signs” (6:26). That is, they did not understand the meaning of Jesus’ actions in the feeding miracle.

Even though the crowd conveys little understanding, Jesus takes up their request to perform a sign like the manna. He

goes on to explain how the manna God gave previously is now available to them. The scripture quoted by the crowd is “he gave them bread from heaven to eat” (6:31). Jesus then interprets the manna as a story about what God is doing in the present. Manna is not simply a story that resides in Israel’s past, but is an on-going gift of God in the present. It is available to us and all who are looking for the spiritual food God gives.

The same, the Passover is the story of God’s liberating power. It was not something confined to the past but claimed as a present action in the remembrance of God’s grace and power. Jesus’ next statement continues this line of thinking. “For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (6:33).

The crowd seems to understand Jesus’ words in this way, and they find his teaching appealing. They respond, “Lord, give us this bread always” (6:34). Their words convey not only that they desire the bread Jesus is speaking about, but that they see him as one like Moses who facilitates this gift. So they request this bread from Jesus.

At this point Jesus identifies himself with the present gift of manna God is giving to the world: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” This is the first of Jesus’ seven “I am” sayings in John’s Gospel, along with “I am the light of the world (8:12),” “I am the door (10:9),” “I am the good shepherd (10:11),” “I am the resurrection and the life (11:25-26),” “I am the way and the truth and the life (14:6),” “I am the vine (15:5).” Each of these “I am” describes an important aspect of Jesus’ divine identity.

What does it mean for Jesus to be manna in your life? How is Jesus like the manna in your troubled time? The Israelites experienced God’s salvation in the Red Sea crossing, but they

still failed to trust God to take care of their needs. Faced with hunger, they immediately thought to turn back to Egypt. Similarly, some Christians have been well since the pandemic, but they still feel panic in wave after wave of lockdown, round after round of restrictions, because they lack peace or even feel a sense of unbelieving.

In the middle of covid pandemic, in the show of all kinds of disasters all over the world, in the raging of worldly values and influence, Jesus Christ never stops his provision of love, care and guidance, To remember Jesus' identities is like receiving manna, the bread of heaven. It brings us peace and joy. It reinforces our strength as the light and salt in this world. It sanctifies us as really God's children.

Like the Israelites in the time of Passover and wilderness, Jesus' bread provides life to those who trust and follow God's word. God provided both water and food where none was available, and Jesus also satisfies those who hunger and thirst in spirit. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.