

**St. Andrew's Cathedral**  
Jackson, Mississippi  
Sermon for August 12, 2018 ~ Proper 14B  
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Jesus' ministry was built on the rich foundation of many stories of feeding and being fed. They are stories about God's providence and God's abundance. Jesus was well-acquainted with those stories - like the story of Melchizedek going out to meet Abraham with a loaf of bread, the story of Ravens bringing bread to the prophet Elijah, and, of course, the Exodus story and how the Sovereign God sustained the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years with manna - bread - from heaven. It is in the wilderness of the desert as in the wilderness of our souls that we hunger. The Exodus theme permeates John's Gospel, setting up a tension between the manna given from heaven to feed the people in the wilderness and the Eucharistic bread that feeds us in the wilderness of our souls. Somewhere in the midst of that tension we find the bread of life: not manna from God, not the flesh of Christ, but the Bread of Life, the Bread that *brings* life.

If this vision of bread in John's Gospel teaches us something about Jesus, perhaps the first lesson to keep in mind is that Jesus is not simple, not plain, not undemanding. Our Savior is many-textured, multifaceted, and complex in flavor. And, in all things, his was a life lived in abundance. Our God is always a bountiful God who provides for us far more abundantly than we can ever ask or imagine! Too often, though, don't we make excuses that shut our lives off from that abundance? Have you ever found yourself holding onto your stuff with a tight grip and saying things that are evidence that you don't really believe God will abundantly provide more than you need to do God's bidding?

Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus had pointed Nicodemus beyond birth to Birth and the Samaritan woman beyond water to Water. In this passage, he points his listeners beyond the meal of the evening before, beyond even the manna in the wilderness which their ancestors had eaten and died, to the true bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

St. Paul admonished the Ephesians and other early congregations because they weren't getting along. His admonition to the Ephesians, which we read this morning, calls Christ's followers who receive the Bread to *become* bread in the way we live. From God's abundance we have been fed, and from God's abundance we are to feed each other, particularly within the household of faith. (Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2)

<sup>25</sup>So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup>Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup>and do not make room for the devil. <sup>28</sup>Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup>Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, <sup>32</sup>and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. <sup>5</sup>Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup>and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

St. Paul was admonishing those early Christians to deal with the anxieties in their life together in ways that are consistent with their faith. The admonition is relevant and timely for us as well. Last week, there were news articles having to do with the use of anxiety to motivate people. The use of anxiety to motivate is not a new idea. It is customary in all unhealthy emotional systems. It is also destructive and divisive.

An emotional system may be a family, a company, a sports team, a governmental entity, a school, a class, or a congregation. Individuals find ways to adapt to the anxieties of the family systems from which they come and bring those behaviors into other emotional systems. In a healthy emotional system, individual members learn to explore and manage the anxiety in their lives and learn to recognize and appropriately respond to anxiety at work in other emotional systems. I believe this is deeply spiritual work. When one of us tries to put their anxiety onto others of us, we need to stop and ask, “What is lacking in your soul that causes you to behave that way?” We also need to stop and ask, “What is lacking in my soul that causes me to want accept that person’s anxiety?”

We’ve seen examples of how anxiety has impaired a congregation’s ability to work through conflict and how it impacts the ability to speak the truth in love. “Healing” this or any emotional system involves a decision on the part of each member to manage his/her own anxiety and to resist the efforts of others who use anxiety to motivate or influence others. Feeding one another involves seeking the truth as well as telling the truth and that often requires management of anxiety. Management of anxiety is something that makes us uniquely human. I invite you to consider that our faith is a God-given resource to help us manage anxiety and, therefore, become more and more human.

Maybe this transition can be a time for us to search ourselves and discover the anxieties that interfere with our life in community and our ability to remain calm when others around us are not. When we do that, the life of the emotional systems of which we are members become healthier and we become more human, because we make better use of the uniquely human part of our brain that allows reason to overcome the reactions that come from the more primitive parts of our brains.

Many of the things that emerge from the more primitive parts of the human brain are necessary for survival. But when we are faced with imaginary or even potential threats, we have the God-given resources and opportunities to more fully express our humanity. And, as [St. Irenaeus](#) once said, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive; and to be alive consists in beholding God.” It is God who calls us to live by divine values and principles so that we can build up the Church, advance God’s reign on earth, and embrace God’s vision of a creation restored in God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Bread of Life, life-giving, life-sustaining Food. He satisfies more than physical hunger. Because of our love for him, we desire to put away the bread that is made with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and wickedness, and we feast upon the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. And, trusting in that bread with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we may then be able to bring nourishment to those around us whose hearts, souls, minds, and wills are hungry for something nutritious, something, someone to believe in. So, “Do not complain among yourselves,” says Jesus. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven,” says Jesus. “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.”