

St. John's Anglican Cathedral

St. John's, Antigua

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 14 (B)

August 8, 2021

DRAFT

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“The most valuable bread”

The Gospel: John 6:35, 41-51

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am

the bread that came down from heaven."

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we

know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them,

"Do not complain among yourselves. No

one can come to me unless drawn by the

Father who sent me; and I will raise that

person up on the last day. It is written in the

prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by

God.' Everyone who has heard and learned

from the Father comes to me. Not that

anyone has seen the Father except the one

who is from God; he has seen the Father.

Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Christ.

Draw us nearer and nearer Blessed Lord.

Amen.

Sing:

Draw us nearer, nearer blessed Lord,

To the cross where Thou hast died;

Draw us nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,

To Thy precious, bleeding side.

Few people knew what Jesus really meant for the world. The world in general tried to ignore him, and if that did not work then the world wanted to get rid of him.

Jesus was an embarrassment for the Jewish leaders who had carefully tutored their

followers that only by offering sacrificial lambs and the like on the burning heap in the Temple of Jerusalem could one get more or less “right with God.” This philosophy even persists today in a few small corners of Judaism which seek above all else to restore the Temple in Jerusalem and its burnt offerings.

But Jesus threw a monkey wrench into this carefully constructed religious framework of the first century. Jesus claimed himself to be the way to get right with God, and, moreover, that all other ways were blind alleys. Jesus was Lord, and Jesus

completely represented the Lord God in heaven.

Our English word, “Lord,” which we Christians use to address both Jesus Christ and God the Father, the word “lord” was derived from an old Anglo Saxon word, “loaf-ward,” “loaf-ward,” a combination of the word “loaf,” as in a loaf of bread, combined with the word, “ward,” w-a-r-d, as in our English word “warden.” The ward was the keeper or protector of something, and a loaf-ward was the keeper or protector of the bread. Over the centuries the word “loafward,” keeper of the bread, became

shortened to the shorter word we now use, “lord.” The lord is the one who keeps the bread for feeding the lord’s workers. The lord is a sort of paymaster as well as the owner of the bread which will be used to pay the owner’s helpers. Our Lord is our controller, our owner, our boss, who tells us what to do. The Lord is our shepherd. But the Lord is also the bread of life. The Lord gave himself on the cross to be sure we would be fed eternally. We exclaim in the Holy Eucharist at the breaking of the bread, “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us,” which symbolizes the relationship between

the bread which feeds us for eternal life and the death of Christ, the perfect sacrifice which substitutes for the impossible requirement to die for our own sins. Jesus Christ died so that we would not have to die an eternal death; Jesus died so we might have eternal life. Jesus, the bread of life, fills our spiritual hunger in ways that nothing else ever will be able to feed us. Jesus satisfies our souls. “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” Psalm 34 says. We get true nourishment from the Lord.

A story is told of a beggar who wandered into a village once and announced that he

had a magic stone that could make the best soup the villagers had ever tasted. The people did not believe him, but one person put a pot of water on the fire to test the beggar. Once the water began to warm up, the beggar dropped his stone into it. He said, “This will be delicious soup. But if someone had a few carrots to add, it would be much better.” A farmer watching the event said he had some carrots, so he dropped them in. The beggar said, “This is truly going to be great soup! But if someone had a bit of beef and some bacon to add to it, it would be even better.” Two villagers

went home and brought back a few chunks of meat and some bacon and dropped them in. The beggar mentioned potatoes, a little salt, and some cabbage. People brought them and placed them in the pot. Before long the villagers sat down to the best pot of stone soup they had ever tasted.

Part of the nutritional value of the bread which Jesus gives us is **our own gifts** which we offer to make the bread of life the best we have ever tasted. Don't you feel much better about yourself if you are able to contribute to the mix of ministries in the congregation? When I was younger I was

always looking for something to do at my church--my volunteer efforts were so fulfilling for my life, more than any other thing I did. I pledged, I tithed, I became an acolyte, I became a crucifer, I became a Lay Reader, I became a Chalice Bearer. I became a Lay Eucharistic Minister. I became a member of what was called a Junior Vestry. I became a member of the Senior Vestry. I became a member of the calling committee when our Rector met mandatory retirement age. I helped hire the new Rector. The new Rector hired me to operate most of the lay support services of

the church. I became trained as a lay pastoral visitor. My life in the church became so fulfilling that when the Rector mentioned seminary to me, I was ready and raring to go, and my dear wife was dazed and amazed by all of this. One thing led to another and then to another and so on and so on. Once one eats more and more of the flesh of the Son of God, one develops an insatiable appetite because nothing else can fulfill one's hunger anywhere near as well.

But if I understand the text today, I had first been given to Jesus by some heavenly contract from God before my conception or

birth. My willingness only served to connect me with the calling God had had for me from before my birth. It simply took a while for me to be ready for what God had in store for my life. We all are in a preparation stage at each step of our life. God has other things in store for us; we only need to be willing and ready to accept God's directions and God's urgings. It's easier to keep one's ears and eyes closed tightly, but if we open ourselves up, just the least amount, the word and work of God becomes infectious in our life, and we see more and more ways of answering our "higher

calling.” And then the Lord called me into a ministry of healing after I came to retirement age. That’s a whole ‘nother story. Ha.

Actress Betty Hutton saw her career go into the pits due to alcoholism, family breakdown, and bankruptcy. But actress Betty Hutton had a wonderful spiritual awakening one day, and later got a job in the Broadway play, “Annie.” All the other actors and actresses had very extensive autobiographies in the Playbill for the show, but Betty Hutton only wrote five words. “I’m back, thanks to God.” “I’m back,

thanks to God.” It brought tears to the audience’s eyes. “I’m back, thanks to God.”

Maybe you also are back, thanks to God. Perhaps you’ve been away. Perhaps you’ve been coming but never spiritually involved in any significant way. Perhaps you have finally heard that still small voice speak in your heart. That little voice can be very persistent if you don’t try to shut it up or drown it out. It can be a very loud small voice. Listen to the word God has for us today and every day. God cares for us. God loves us. God gave his very life for us. No one else has done as much for us personally,

not even our own parents or friends. God loves us more than any other, so much more than anything. So we try to love God back as best we can.

In the East a merchant selling vegetables was approached by a stranger who offered to buy unlimited amounts of his vegetables and his vegetable scale as well. The merchant was taken aback and asked for double the price of the vegetables for such an offer, which the stranger readily accepted. The stunned merchant, sensing something awry, said for the stranger to come back on the following day to close the deal. That night

the merchant discussed the unusual offer with his wife, who said something must be up and that he should quadruple the asking price. Next day the stranger accepted the much higher price and said the merchant could in fact keep the vegetables, but he wanted only the weighing scale. Now the merchant went into a real panic; on subsequent days the value of the deal became greater than all the real estate value of the whole market. Finally, the merchant could stand it no longer and accepted the deal; and as does one from the East when one recognizes the other as a teacher, sage,

or superior, the merchant prostrated himself before the stranger and begged him to reveal the secret of the scale, willing to give the scale away for free at this point. The stranger smiled and explained, “There is a small stone that you are using for a weight. It looks like a common pebble. But beneath its crust it is a gem, which I, who am a gem expert, recognize that gem to be of inestimable value.”

Such a gem represents the inner worth of a disciple who is only aware of the outer crust of their limited self, not seeing inside to their true vast potential. But Christ sees

our inner value and gave up all for us. We each and all are gems of inestimable value.

One drawback of being sponsored by a congregation for ordination is that that congregation forever sees their sponsor-ees as the person they were before ordination. Jesus ran into a similar problem when he tried to speak in his hometown synagogue: they would not listen to him--he was amazed at their lack of faith and was able to do few miracles. In our gospel lesson for today, the people say of Jesus, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come

down from heaven’?” They grumbled about Jesus’ credentials just as did the people of Israel grumble about Moses’ credentials out there in the wilderness. But Jesus was truly the one come down from heaven, the bread that came down from heaven to feed us and nourish us. The miraculous food that the Israelites ate in the desert, manna, manna was not given to them by Moses but by the hand of almighty God. But that manna did not serve to give anyone anything more than food for the day. The people still needed the special bread which only Christ could give. We too need that bread.

As we come forward today to the Lord's table for a taste of the bread which gives eternal life, let us remember that this is only a sampling of what will be in store for us at the heavenly banquet which will surpass all banquets. At that banquet in heaven we will always have our fill of the presence of the Lord who will be our life and our light. He has given himself for each of us. May we see his gift of himself for what it is, a pearl of great price, an offering which we cannot refuse, a power which no one can afford to ignore, a gift of inestimable value.

Sometimes all it takes is for us to be great in the kingdom of heaven to offer to bring a new person to church with us. Sometimes it is simply being there for someone who has lost a loved one, or who is ill and needing the healing presence of one other person who cares for them. We are the ones Christ is calling to hear his Father's beckoning in our ears.

Jesus tells us he is the bread of life. Jesus is the food of life. Jesus sustains us, encourages us, coaches us, and helps us win just one more soul for God's Kingdom. We are in the race of our lives.

And as our spiritual food, Jesus also has us on a special diet: we can only study so much; we can only pray and meditate so much; but, finally, we have to perform. The angels assist us, but the angels cannot do our job of helping others to realize how God is calling them, tugging on their hearts to come here to worship and to go out to do God's work in our world, a world lost without Jesus.

Will you go for Jesus today? Will you find one new person to bring here next Sunday? Will you be the one God wants to

use to bring God's love to one more person wandering and lost?

Let's go for the Gold, the Gold of the goal of helping just one more person to find the embrace of God in their lives and to have the joy we have in Jesus our Lord and Savior.

Jesus, Lamb of God, feed us today.
Jesus, Lord of Lords, make us more complete and holy today. Jesus, lover of our souls, touch us today and enliven and strengthen us in all the days to come.

Amen.

Hymn by Frances Crosby, 1875

I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice,

And it told Thy love to me;

But I long to rise in the arms of faith

And be closer drawn to Thee.

Refrain:

Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord, To the
cross where Thou hast died;

Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed
Lord, To Thy precious, bleeding side.

Consecrate me now to Thy dear service,
Lord, By the pow'r of grace divine;

Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope,
And my will be lost in Thine.

Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
That before Thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my
dearest God

I commune as friend with friend!

There are depths of love that I can never
know

Till I cross the narrow sea;

There are heights of joy that I may never
reach, Till I rest in peace with Thee.

Description: The Olympic gold is a only a foretaste of the pearl of infinite price, Jesus. As we bring others to know the love of God, we too share in the shining treasure that has no price.

Tags: Gold, price, love, Christ, Moses, temple, Jerusalem, home, town, sponsor, value, stone, soup, bread, life, lord, Jesus