

Text: John 6: 25-35

Title: Jesus you are the bread of life, why am I so hungry?

Rev. Sharon Smith

Objectives:

- To lead us to a place where we will know our need and our deep gratitude to God as the giver of all good things, that we discover God in all things, that all things lead us to commune with God.
- To see the co-existence of wounding and resurrection life in every moment of life
- To understand each day as a journey from gift to surrender.

Jesus you are the bread of life, why am I so hungry?

Three images come to mind.

The first image comes from a book called Holy Hunger.

Growing up in a wealthy family, eating at the table was filled with rules. And Margaret was often too afraid at the table to enjoy and savour the fine cuisine served to her.

Later in her life, Margaret began to overeat not because she was hungry but because she was free to eat. And overeating was a way to numb the feelings of loneliness or grief that she couldn't bear. She could fill up the emptiness with food. Food was there in as large a quantity as she wanted. She recalls how she would dress in frumpy clothes, cover her head with a large oversized hat so that she wouldn't be recognized and go to the grocery store, where she would buy large quantities of pastries and chocolate. She couldn't wait to get into the car and she would begin to eat and eat compulsively. For deep inside there was another hunger... one that food could not satisfy.

Jesus you are the bread of life, why am I so hungry?

I remember watching with exhaustion and frustration a documentary of Emperor penguins. Where the mother and father penguins take turns to hunt for fish to feed their babies. One parent covers the young to prevent him/her from predators and from the icy cold, while the other awkwardly waddles to the waters to dive through the waves and hunt for fish. They waddle back and then swap roles. It is a continuous and exhausting process.

The baby penguins never seem to have their fill. It seems that the fish the parent carefully transfers beak to beak cannot keep up with the penguin's growth.

Life is so fragile, balancing on a tight rope. Will there be enough, will the parents have enough energy to keep going? Will the frozen conditions and the predators be kept at bay?

This life-giving food is not guaranteed. Many young die hungry.

And a third image from a Ukrainian Orthodox church. The bread and wine for the Eucharist in this community is prepared before the service by the Priest behind a wall of beautiful icons. Here the bread and wine are combined into a large chalice.

Two young servers take hold of a red cloth and stretch it out. The priest takes a golden spoon and administers the elements from the chalice to each baptised person leaning over the red cloth. It is an act of surrender, a demonstration of need and longing for God.

There is this fragile moment where the spoon is raised to an open mouth, not knowing if it will be too little or too much. And yet in this very human moment, something of Christ's life is ingested and by faith is sustenance for the journey.

**Hunger, too much food, emptiness, not enough food, the fragility of life, faith...
Jesus you are the bread of life, why am I so hungry?**

In John's Gospel, the day after Jesus feeds the multitude, the crowd follows him to the other side of the sea seeking food and, perhaps, insight into the source of this food and the nature of the person who offers it. The crowd approaches Jesus with a story, a story of food they believe to have been provided by Moses. Jesus responds to this odd community of disciples, Galilean peasants, and Jewish leaders by expanding their story.

It was not Moses, after all, who provided food, but God, and the story that they bring does not end as an event that occurred in the distant past, but is brought into the present reality of the listeners through the presence of Christ in the body of Jesus—heavenly bread for a world that is always encountering God anew.

Significantly, Christ does not limit the benefits of his presence to this gathered crowd—the living bread that came down from heaven is not offered for this group alone, but is given for the life of the world.

Jesus' presence, the offering of his body as living bread, *accomplishes* something: it makes abundant life present for the whole world, not just for a given time and place.

And it is always enfleshed.

I love the words of orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann in his book *For the Life of the World...*

He writes that:

Humanity must eat in order to live...

It is as if we must take parts of the world around us into ourselves and transform it into bodies – into flesh and blood.

Turkey, mashed potato, cranberry sauce becomes cells, neurones, ligaments, bone.

And so as the Biblical story progresses a central image of a banquet emerges – a place where we will eat with all humanity, a feast, a table of hospitality (for friends and strangers, even enemies) to eat and drink with God.

And here at this table there is also no separation of material and spiritual food.

Somehow all the food that humans eat is:

- Given by God
- Given for communion with God.

All that exists is God's gift to humanity and all that exists, exists to make God known to humanity, to make humanities life communion with God.

- It is divine love made food, made life for human beings.
- God makes all creation the sign and means of God's presence and wisdom, love and revelation.
- O taste and see that the Lord is good.

We are hungry beings – ultimately hungry for God.

And yet we live in a fragile world.

Inside us we experience gratitude, we are thankful for things in life AND at the same time we experience unfulfilled hungers and longings.

And my friends at this table there is room for it all.

Richard Rohr says that:

“We do not need to be afraid of the depths and breadths of our own lives, of what this world offers us or asks of us. We are given permission to become intimate with our own experiences, learn from them, and allow ourselves to descend to the depth of things...

Like Christ, we are all indeed wounded and resurrected at the same time.”

Universal Christ

For the paradox is this:

that when we are able to be with our sense of emptiness, we begin to be filled.

It is precisely the hunger that we need to be with.

Margaret's journey taught her that if, rather than just following the impulse to wander into the pantry and eat, she paid attention to the fact that something was making her uncomfortable or she was feeling empty or an ache, she may learn a great deal.

What is this emptiness about?

What is it that I am really hungering for?
What would I be feeling right now if I were not so preoccupied with whether or not I'm going to eat or work or achieve or be needed/loved?
And the key is to start inquiring about the longing.

A Longing that is ultimately Holy.

For Longing by John O Donehue

Blessed be the longing that brought you here
And quickens your soul with wonder.

May you have the courage to listen to the voice of desire
That disturbs you when you have settled for something safe.

May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease
To discover the new direction your longing wants you to take.

May the forms of your belonging—in love, creativity, and friendship—
Be equal to the grandeur and the call of your soul.

May the one you long for long for you.

May your dreams gradually reveal the destination of your desire.

May a secret Providence guide your thought and nurture your feeling.

May your mind inhabit life with the sureness with which your body inhabits the world.

May your heart never be haunted by ghost-structures of old damage.

May you come to accept your longing as divine urgency.

May you know the urgency with which God longs for you.”