

Sermon – “Bread of Angels”

Sunday, August 1, 2021

Scripture: Psalm 78:23-29, John 6:24-35

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In our first scripture reading, Psalm 78:23-29, the psalmist testifies to God’s steadfast and reliable hospitality. When the Israelites question God, asking, “Can God spread a table in the wilderness?” God responds with the *bread of angels*, divine gifts of manna and quail, given daily for nourishment and sustenance. Let us open our hearts and minds to the word of God.

23 Yet God commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; 24 God rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven. 25 Mortals ate of the bread of angels; God sent them food in abundance. 26 God caused the east wind to blow in the heavens, and by God’s power God led out the south wind; 27 God rained flesh upon them like dust, winged birds like the sand of the seas; 28 God let them fall within their camp, all around their dwellings. 29 And they ate and were well filled, for God gave them what they craved. Amen.

Our second scripture reading, John 6:24-35, outlines the events that occur the day following Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the 5000 with bread and fish, which we read together last week. Jesus and the disciples have landed safely on the other side of the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum. The disciples are still digesting the meaning of Christ walking on the water and the people are still trying to grasp the enigma of who Jesus is. Jesus, on the other hand, wants to communicate that faith is more than clarity of facts or intellectual assent, faith is an encounter with the living God that nourishes and sustains one’s life. Hear now, God’s holy word.

24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. 25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set God’s seal." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the One whom God has sent." 30 So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35 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. Amen.

The title of the sermon “Bread of Angels”

Text: Mortals ate of the bread of angels; God sent them food in abundance. Psalm 78:25

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, give us this day our daily bread and nourish our spirits with your abundant presence in our lives. As we reflect together on your Word, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

One of the art pieces Peter and I inherited from his father last fall found a home in our library. It is the plaster mold for the bronze sculpture Will Kieffer donated to Yale University, his alma mater, in 1992. *Bread of Angels* is a bust of Yale’s nineteenth President and renaissance scholar, Angelo Bartlett Giamatti looking upward toward the heavens.

Along with the renaissance, Dr. Giamatti had a lifelong compassion for baseball and became the Commissioner of Major League Baseball before his untimely death in 1989. Some of us may remember him negotiating Pete Rose’s ban in an effort to bring integrity back to the game and the game back to the people. Some of us may also be acquainted with his son and actor Paul Giamatti.

Bart Giamatti became the President of Yale in 1978, Peter’s freshman year, and made an impression on Will when he welcomed the incoming students with a challenge to venture the deep waters of knowledge and to pursue wisdom for the sake of wisdom and not just as a means to a profession. Giamatti believed a liberal arts education is both empowering and liberating and advocated for the students he served.

The title Will chose for the sculpture of Giamatti, *Bread of Angels*, is a quote from the psalm we read this morning and a reference to Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*. Will’s copy of this renaissance classic has also found a home in our library not too far from *The Bread of Angels*.

Dante’s epic poem was written in the 14th century at the end of the Dark Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, the birth of knowledge which shed light on Europe. Dante’s poem explores life after death. On the surface, the poem describes Dante’s travels through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise; however, on a deeper allegorical level, it represents the soul’s journey toward God.

One first hears word of the *bread of angels* in Dante’s third poem, *Paradise*. The stanza opens with the deep, unexplored waters they are about to charter...those who raise their mouths in search of angel’s bread are those who hunger for the knowledge of God or wisdom in the high seas before them. The *bread of angels* in Dante’s paradise symbolizes the pursuit of knowledge and seemed an apropos title for the sculpture of a renaissance scholar who spent a lifetime pursuing knowledge and truth and encouraging others to do the same.

Dante’s repeated emphasis that faith alone will permit the reader to grasp eternal wonders suggests that the bread of angels is more than food for thought: it is the full fresh loaf for the nourishment of the soul risen by the yeast of discovery, salvation, and the love of Christ.

The soul is not fed simply by having knowledge of God and God's creation. Partaking of the *bread of angels* is participating in a relationship with God. This is the insight Christ is trying to impart to those who seek him following the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

When Jesus says, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty,' he is saying that a relationship with the word made flesh will nourish one's being. Faith is an encounter with the living God, the one who is 'the way, and the truth, and the life.' The One who speaks to us in this curiously metaphorical way wants us to understand that the core of who we are will literally starve without God's presence in our lives.

Columbia University psychologist Lisa Miller talks about the importance of nurturing our children's spirituality and relationship with God in her book [The Spiritual Child](#). In a compelling collection of psychological and neurological research, she asserts that children who are raised on the *bread of angels* with a robust and well-developed spiritual life are more content, more optimistic, more flexible, and better equipped to deal with unexpected storms in the high seas of life than those who are not.

Children nourished with spirituality, according to Miller's research, grow into adults who are grateful, feel a sense of calling in their work, regard human relationships as sacred, and can see misfortunes as opportunities.

As we reap the resources provided by this faith community, let us feed our children on the bread of angels. As we harvest corn for the homeless tomorrow evening and nourish our neighborhood during this service week, let us collect and distribute the manna of heaven and the love of Christ. As we remain steadfast in our faith, let us continue to raise our mouths in search of angel's bread and hunger for righteousness and justice in the deep, unexplored waters we travel on our journeys towards God. Amen.