

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral  
Sermon August 2, 2009  
Rev. Canon Catherine Nichols

Just like the people in the Old Testament story, and the people in the New Testament Gospel story, we are people looking for...in the Old Testament, GOD...in the New Testament, we are people looking for Jesus.

So today, it's all about bread. In the Exodus story, as Moses and God's people wander through the wilderness, the folks are hungry. They're starving. They're missing the food they used to have when they were slaves in Egypt. Missing those fleshpots, missing the garlic, and they're murmuring. Murmuring--that means grumbling. That means complaining. And God...merciful God...sends them food: meat, myriad quail, and bread. Sticky white stuff. They wake up to find this white material, that resembles hoarfrost, covering the ground. And they're told, "It's manna." "It's manna - the bread which the Lord has given you to eat."

And then in today's story from John's Gospel, we see the consequences from last week's story--the feeding of the 5000. Five loaves, two fishes. Bread, and meat. And Jesus pronounces: "You seek me because of the feeding of many, with the loaves." Jesus then goes on, with John's "Christology"...that is "who Jesus, the Christ, is." "God gives you true bread, that which comes down from heaven." He's talking about Himself. The Son of God who was sent down from Heaven to be with us, and then returns to Heaven, the resurrected Christ.

And in John's Gospel,--and John's Gospel only,-- Jesus calls Himself the Bread of Life. "If you come to me, you will neither hunger, nor thirst." "I am the Bread of Life...if you come to me, you will neither hunger, nor thirst." What good news! Jesus, the Christ, sustains us. We must, of course, be fed, in order to live. We gotta' eat, in order to proceed along the path of our lives. Food and drink are basic. No food, no liquid...no life.

But sometimes we need food, for a whole lot more than just mere sustenance. Sometimes, our path seems barren. We feel bored, listless...it's difficult to summon the energy to put one foot in front of the other. At times like that, God is there as the Bread of Heaven, the traveler's sustenance. Sometimes our thirst for love, for companionship, for consolation, can almost overwhelm us. And then God provides Living Water, healing and surrounding us with compassion. The merciful God we prayed to in this morning's Collect. Weekly, we come to God's table, to receive Jesus the Christ, the Bread of Life. We're fed spiritually, and we're given strength to go back out into the world to continue our journey.

But I'm convinced that God does not mean for us to come to this table alone, as isolated individuals. Next week, at this service, we'll celebrate Holy Baptism. A bunch of young children being welcomed into this community of the faithful. And indeed, we do Baptism in community, because that's what our lives together is all about...community.

Our Dean often speaks of Trinity as a healing community. Surely, our worship is part of our healing. But just as Paul writes of all of us being parts of the Body of Christ, in today's marvelous reading from Ephesians...so our lives in Christ are not meant to be lived separately. We are in communion...one with another...as a healing community. And a healing community must be a community...a faith community made up of a variety of people, with a variety of gifts, as Paul wrote. A community who--together--offer wholeness.

The membership of this Cathedral is pretty large. We think it's some 1700 souls. And to be here, especially as a newcomer, or an old-timer who feels you don't know anybody anymore, can be pretty daunting. Can be lonely, can be challenging, to try to become part of this community. So we're in process of introducing the Trinity Neighbors Program. Trinity Neighbors divides all members into neighborhood groups, according to zip code,(approximately)...a way to offer us a smaller community to belong to, within the huge congregation of Trinity Cathedral.

You'll be invited to gather with your Trinity neighbors, sometime in the next couple of months. The Trinity Neighbors Committee has worked months, so this opportunity for all members will result, in folks knowing some of their neighbors better--or indeed, for the first time. Trinity Neighbors. The goals are simple. We hope you'll learn who some of your neighbors are, so you'll recognize them in church. We hope you'll chat with them at the coffee hour. We hope you'll support your Trinity Neighbors. When babies from your Trinity Neighborhood are baptized, come to the baptism. Stay connected to that family. Draw out the kids, as they grow through toddlerhood, and even into young adulthood. Care about them. Engage them. When someone in your Trinity Neighbors group has just come home from a stay in the hospital, or has lost a loved one, or has a new baby...take them food...offer them the Bread of Life...as a good neighbor.

The Trinity Neighbors program is designed to further Jesus' invitation to all of us, to membership in this healing community of the faithful. We heal by sharing, by getting outside of ourselves, by being there for others. Jesus, the Bread of Life, offers healing--both at God's table, and out in God's world. Sharing bread with our Trinity neighbors, will--I guarantee--help us to know, and to love one another...just as Jesus knows and loves us, in the gifts of bread and wine.

If, by mid-October, you haven't been invited yet to come to a Trinity Neighbors gathering, please let us know. We want everyone to be in a group, or at least to be invited to be in a group. Jesus, the Bread of Life, urges us to share Him with one another. By being in community, we can be part of one another's joys, one another's sorrows--and therefore--a part of one another's healing. Jesus invites all of us into wholeness. So mortals ate the Bread of Angels, God provided for them food enough.