

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
10th Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 12/Year B
July 29, 2018
Text: John 6:1-21

“You satisfy the hungry heart”

“Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted and when they were satisfied...”

When they were satisfied...

There is nothing like being full after having eaten a scrumptious meal. To those of you who haven't had breakfast yet-I'm sorry about this-but think back to some of the most wonderful meals you have ever had in your lives. Just think about that for just a moment or two. And try not to drool over your prayer books.

There are a few meals that stand out for me. For instance, the meals that my mother cooked. I just have to put that out there first. I have to give mom props first. She could *cook* and I rarely had anything on my plate that I wouldn't eat...well, except for beets. Beet juice would ruin everything on the plate. But mom's meals-delicious!

There are holiday dinners including the ones we serve here at St. B's. Oh and there was the first time I dined as a guest at The Tenderloin Room at the Chase. Dinner was superb and for a couple of hours I pretended to be one of the rich and famous.

But as I have shared many times over, THE best meals were with family down South.

Almost every summer when I was a little girl, my siblings and I would spend what seemed to be an eternity on I-55 going south. We would start out in the wee hours of the mornings with KMOX blasting on the radio until there would be nothing but the sound of static. And when there was complete silence we would turn the dial until we found music that we could all agree upon. We had our own karaoke party going on until one by one

everyone but the driver would get in a little snooze. As the sun came up our stomachs also awakened and called out ‘Feed me.’ Unlike these days when it is sometimes more convenient to pull off the road and drive through a fast food lane, we always packed a cooler full of sandwiches, snacks, and cold drinks. We would eat until we were satisfied and then sometimes nod off again. And then after what seemed like hours and hours we would finally hit the I-10 and we knew we were closing in on our destination, Bay St. Louis, MS.

Food was never scarce once we got to my aunt and uncle’s house. After initial hellos to family and neighbors, pots and pans were immediately pulled out and soon the wonderful aroma of food cooking on the stove would begin to fill the air. And we would say a blessing in thanksgiving for safe travels and for the food set before us and eat until we were satisfied. And that was only the beginning of the huge meals that would be prepared at least twice each day, sometimes for a dozen or two dozen and more people depending on the day’s activities. With true Southern hospitality, there were platters of food to be had morning and evening, platters of eggs, sausage, ham, grits, toast, and homemade biscuits. And platters of smothered cabbage, fresh corn on the cob, green beans, potato salad, fried or baked chicken, pork chops, gumbo, the boiled crab we caught on any given day and copious amounts of shrimp prepared in various ways because back then they never costed more than \$2-\$3 a pound. (Anything over that was just “plain wrong” my aunt used to say. Ah, food, glorious food!

Our lectionary switches over to the Gospel of John and we hear the story of Jesus preparing a meal. It was quite the feast and didn’t require a jaunt to the nearest Piggly Wiggly-no snapping of green beans, no peeling pounds of potatoes, no shelling and deveining endless shrimp, or risking the smart pinch of live crabs going into huge pots of seasoned water. But it was a great and unexpected meal. With five barley loaves and two fish, all ate and were satisfied, so wrote John. And there were twelve baskets left over.

The feeding of thousands is told in each of the four gospels, each one telling it in the writer’s own way. It is one of Jesus’ best known miracles perhaps because of its multiple telling and perhaps because it impacted so many.

Just like in last week’s gospel from Mark, John says that Jesus’ healings had drawn a large crowd. They have witnessed Jesus healing the

sick among them, teaching and preaching, and making the wounded whole. Going up a mountainside with his companions, Jesus looked with compassion upon the crowd and it was late. He turned to Philip and asked, “*Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?*” Jesus already knew what he was going to do. He had his way of testing folks. Of inviting people to think outside the box. Of nudging selfishness into Kingdom-giving mode. Of helping people realize that with compassion for the other there will always be more than enough. That scarcity does not have to be the way of the world. There is plenty for everyone.

You and I are blessed to have the opportunity to buy groceries and prepare food for ourselves and our families, or to dine out if we so choose. I would suspect that there may be a few of us that have seen lean days at one time or another. Few of us may never have known or will ever know true hunger or wonder where our next meal was coming from like so many in our communities and throughout the world. There are those of us who believe that there really are enough resources and innovations and scientific breakthroughs to feed and clothe and take care of the basic needs of all God’s people. There really is enough when we think less of ‘I and me’ and more of ‘us and we’. There is enough, when we are willing to share what we have. Maybe this is how the five thousand were fed that day.

As I think back, it wasn’t just the food and the delicious-ness of it all but the sharing of it. Most evenings as tables were being set, there was always someone who said to my aunt, “Mama, I told so and so the next time we made this or that, I would save them some.” And without hesitation, a plate was made and set aside. Even better was, “So and so, come get this plate and take it down to so and so’s house and we will eat when you get back. Hurry on now!” “...we will eat when you get back...” There was always enough to share.

As I began my sermon, I asked you to consider the wonderful meals you’ve had in your lifetimes. And I wonder if anyone considered the feast we share Sunday after Sunday.

Today like every Sunday, we gather to hear the Word of God and to partake in a sacred meal at the Lord’s Table where all are invited. Just as Jesus shared a small boy’s simple meal of loaves and fishes, he shares with us his special gift of spiritual food, his Body and Blood-food meant to feed

our souls and give us strength so that we may be sent out into the world so that we can share our resources. Sent to feed the world.

Let us pray,

*You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat,
Come give to us, O saving Lord, the Bread of Life to eat. **

Amen.

**Gift of Finest Wheat, by Omer Westendorf*