



## SERMONS THAT WORK

**Pentecost 10**  
**Proper 13 (B)**

**Food That Endures**

**RCL: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a; Psalm 51:1-13; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35**

*This sermon, written by the Rt. Rev. Frank S. Logue, originally ran August 5, 2012.*

A deep spiritual hunger is implanted in every human heart. Different people will seek to fill this need in different ways, but the hunger is not unique. People yearn for a deeper connection, an eternal spiritual connection, and when that is lacking will seek any means to be fulfilled.

Jesus said he came that we might have life and that abundantly. Yet, he who offered fullness of joy was often met by people with simpler, lesser needs. In the fifth chapter of John's gospel, Jesus met a Samaritan woman who longed for living water so she wouldn't have to keep returning to the well each day. Jesus started with that basic need and used it to forge a relationship with her that ended with the woman reconnected to God and to others in her community.

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus has met the immediate needs of a host of people. Those remaining after he fed 5,000 with a little fish and bread seek out Jesus. Jesus tells them, "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."

The previous day, Jesus fed their physical hunger with bread and fish, and the crowd sought him out once more. Jesus points them to their spiritual hunger, which is what he really wanted to fill. After all, the people were created to love God and love others as they loved themselves, and in chasing after other needs, they risked getting further from the real nourishment they needed.

Jesus compares this to the original bread from heaven, manna, with which God miraculously fed the children of Israel for 40 years in an uninhabitable wasteland. This was the daily bread that would come anew each morning, with enough to last the day and a double portion for the Sabbath. Now Jesus compares the daily bread of manna, which God gave in the desert, to the Bread of Life, which God offers in Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Jesus offers nourishment, which goes to the heart of our most basic human need to fill a spiritual hunger. Having been created to be in relationship with God, without that connection, we can feel empty.

It is an easy move to connect Jesus referring to himself as the Bread of Life to the Eucharist. For in the mystery of the Eucharistic feast we eat the bread and drink the wine, and in so doing we partake of the body and blood of Jesus. But we don't want to jump to that correct response so quickly that we miss the bigger picture.

This discourse comes when Jesus has two more years of ministry ahead of him. In fact, this is, after all, John Chapter 6, out of 21 chapters. There is much more time left in Jesus' ministry before he gets to that last meal with his disciples. John's gospel makes clear what the other three gospels only hint at: the Eucharist is not about Jesus' death alone. Jesus' self-giving act in communion is not only concerned with the Last Supper, the cross and the empty tomb alone. Jesus' whole life, rather than just one or two events, will institute the sacrament of communion. Put differently, faith is not in Jesus' death and resurrection alone, but in Jesus' whole life – from Bethlehem to Golgotha, and beyond to an empty tomb in a garden, Jesus' appearances to his disciples, and his ascension to heaven.

Everything Jesus did – who Jesus was and how he acted – are part of God's revelation to us. We cannot separate one part of his life from the rest. Nor should we have a Christian part of our lives separate from the rest of our lives. We are to take Jesus' whole story and make it part of our whole story. This is much more than hearing the word, it is word and deed.

In baptism, we do not simply hear of Jesus' baptism, but water is poured over us as a sign that we are united with Christ through baptism. We don't just hear the story, we actually get wet. In the Eucharist, we don't merely listen to the words, "Take eat," but we actually get up, come to the altar rail to take and eat. It's not just the bread that we take, bless, break and give. God took Jesus' whole life, blessed, broke it and gave it to us. We are to let that story of God's love for us take us, bless us, break us and give us back to the world.

Jesus wanted those who followed him after having their fill of fish and bread to discover real spiritual nourishment so that they would never hunger again. And yes, one is fed through the Eucharist, but this too is only part of the picture. Our Sunday worship is to be just a part of how we are fed spiritually.

Compare spiritual nourishment to food. Eating out once a week in a restaurant is not unusual. In fact, it is rare to find someone who eats out only once a week. But what if that was the only meal the person ate. Someone who goes back to their familiar seat in a restaurant week after week to enjoy their one meal of the week could never be nourished enough to make it through the remaining six days.

In the same way, common worship in church on Sunday is meant to be an important part of one's spiritual food and drink, but it will never sate your hunger if this is your whole plan for feeding you spirit.

Fortunately, the Episcopal Church has a centuries-old norm of daily prayer that is well suited to filling this void. The Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer as found in the Book of Common Prayer are a wonderfully enriching daily devotion. When praying in this way, together with the daily scripture readings, one is better prepared to meet whatever comes. It is not that troubles never occur to people who pray and read their Bible; it's just that those who marinate daily in prayer and scripture are more connected to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Then whatever comes, they can call on that connection.

For those looking for an easy way to get started, there is the very helpful "Forward Day by Day," which in booklet form or online offers a brief daily reflection to accompany the scripture readings. The booklet offers the same readings as those used in the Daily Office. Either way, you'll spend 15-20 minutes out of each day re-centering your life in the ground of your being, the God who made you and redeemed you. There is no better way to nourish your spiritual side than through a daily meal of prayer and scripture reading.

So much of our lives is spent working for the food that perishes. We must work to earn food, water and shelter and all the extras that make life enjoyable. But we know there is more to life than the daily grind. For a fulfilled life, one should commit a portion of each day to prayer and reading the Bible, for that is the food that endures for eternal life and the gift of Jesus who came so that you might have an abundant life.

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