

Lectionary 18 Tenth Sunday after Pentecost Year B 2021
August 1, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bread is a very important image in the Bible and throughout Christianity. Last Sunday, we heard the story of Jesus and the disciples feeding 5,000 people as well as the story of the prophet Elisha feeding 100 people. Today's readings continue in this theme of bread, and we will hear more about bread for three more weeks after today. To have five weeks of readings in a row about bread means that there must be something very important about it. And, in fact, there are many important things we could say about bread. But, I think one piece is the significance of *daily* bread. By providing five weeks of readings about bread, we not only *hear* about bread, but we also *receive*, in no uncertain terms, *daily bread* through the Word of God as we gather on Sundays and read the scriptures throughout the week.

In these five weeks, we hear about bread and the ways in which God provides that bread to God's people. We hear that Jesus is bread—the living bread from heaven, the one who gives himself to us so that we might never be hungry. And we hear that God provides this bread to us each and every day; over and over again.

I have plenty of stories about bread—which is probably a good thing for these next few weeks. But a couple stories specifically came to mind when thinking about daily bread.

I have a teenage niece who lives quite a comfortable life. She and her family spend about half the year in Vail, Colorado—a fairly upscale mountain town that is great for skiing, snowboarding, and shopping, and they spend the other half of the year in the Caribbean, living in their home on one of the Virgin Islands. My niece and her sisters have been homeschooled, and so they also don't have the same demands of a busy daily schedule. But, this life can also have its downsides at times. You see, my niece tends to have some extra time on her hands, and especially when she has run out of books to read, she can get fairly bored. And it makes some sense. She doesn't have the same ability to make friends and meet people her age at school and various extracurricular activities, and even in these fun places, there's a limit to what you can do alone. And so, she's bored. As part of her boredom, a few years ago, she decided to try out becoming a vegetarian. Now, she doesn't really have any other reasoning for doing this, except because it seems like a fun thing to try, and at least it's an interesting challenge. She's old enough to know a bit about nutrition, and so she understands the difficulty of substituting other foods for the proteins and nutrients that one would normally get from meat. So, this has become her fun challenge. Now, I don't have any problem with vegetarians, but I've rarely run into someone that has become a vegetarian simply because they were bored and were seeking another challenge in life.

So, when I heard this, I couldn't help but ask myself, "How lucky is she, that she has so much time and freedom and money that she could make a decision like this?" Certainly, I could choose to become a vegetarian, but it would require significant planning and effort that I'm not willing to devote. I have other ways to spend my time, and plenty of challenges in life already. But it seems like for my niece, life has gotten so simple, that she has to make receiving her daily bread more of a challenge, almost like it's a game. Of course, I give thanks to God that she has daily bread, and that she doesn't have to worry about how this bread might find its way to her family's table.

But that's not the case for everyone. As we think about daily bread, I think also about the clients at King's Kupboard, and those that are hungry throughout the world. Our clients come,

and they get what they can from our food pantry. Thankfully, we have a relationship with Kroger that allows us to regularly provide fresh produce and a variety of meat to our clients. And currently there's plenty to go around. But I remember a time at King's Kupboard in the not too distant past, when we struggled to have much in the way of variety. There were times when there just wasn't much available at the food bank where we purchase quite a bit of our food, and when food drives and personal donations were at a low point in the year. If you add into that the nights on which we served 70 or 80 clients, those last few clients would have very little choice in what they received for their daily bread. Yet, in most cases, each client was still thankful to receive anything at all. They were grateful to receive something to take home for themselves and their family. And our clients today are beyond grateful for the abundance of produce, meat, and other items we are able to provide. This is a very different picture of daily bread.

In these two stories, we have two very different perspectives. In one case, there is an abundance of choice and no concern about God's promise of daily bread. My niece can rely on the fact that because of her family's financial stability, there will always be plenty of food and she won't have trouble finding daily bread in all varieties.

But in the case of many of our King's Kupboard clients, they rely very heavily on what we are able to provide. If it weren't for food pantries, and generous neighbors, family and friends, they would not have their daily bread. I'm sure many have gone without before. In these cases, we who have enough are called to be the providers of God's daily bread. We act as God's hands for our clients by giving generously of our time, talents and possessions. And we are guided by the stories of God's hands actively working to provide bread for the Israelites in our reading today.

In today's reading from Exodus, we hear of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, hungry, looking for something to eat. They are tired and hungry, and they fear that they will starve and die as they wander about. They even complain that they would have been better off living as slaves in Egypt, because at least then, they had bread to eat. They, like our King's Kupboard clients, are longing for daily bread, for something that will give them strength for their journey. And immediately after their complaints, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying that bread would rain from heaven each day; enough so that everyone could eat their fill. And not only that, but a few verses later, God provides quail so that they will have meat to eat each day as well.

God promises to provide our daily bread. And God has provided enough for all. Many of us are lucky enough to be in a position to purchase our food, to have basically any variety we want, to enjoy our food whenever and however we please, and to not fret if it goes to waste. But we know that this is not the reality for all people. And in these cases, it is our call and duty as Christians to ensure that all of God's people are fed. This happens through us as we live out God's call. We are God's hands, providing daily bread to all in need.

And we have the ability to do this because Christ lives in us. You've heard the saying before, "You are what you eat." When we gather at the Lord's Table, and we receive Christ's body and blood, we become Christ for this world. We are what we eat—we are the body of Christ, and Christ lives in us. By gathering at the Lord's Table, we are empowered by Christ's presence in us so that we might leave this place and go out to feed the world.

This is our call. This is God's command. God promises that all people will receive their daily bread. And so, as we leave the Lord's Table today and every week, we are sent out, fed by Christ, and strengthened to be God's hands and voices that work to share daily bread with a world in need. Thanks be to God. Amen.