## John 6:35, 41-51

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. Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

There is a bit of Jewish humor that goes like this:

An old man goes to a diner every day for lunch. He always orders the soup du jour. One day the manager asks him how he liked his meal. The old man replies, “It was good, but you could give a little more bread. Two slices is not enough.” So the next day the manager tells the server to give him four slices of bread. “How was your meal, sir?” the manager asks. “It was good, but you could give a little more bread,” comes the reply. So the next day the manager asks the server to give him eight slices of bread. “How was your meal today, sir?” asks the manager. “Good, but you could give a little more bread.” So, the next day the manager tells the server to give the man a whole loaf of bread – 16 slices with his soup. “How was your meal, sir?” the manager asks when the man comes to pay. “It was good, but you could give just a little more bread,” the man replies once again. The manager is now obsessed with seeing this customer satisfied with his meal, so he goes to the bakery and orders a six-foot-long loaf of bread. The next day, the server and manager cut the loaf in half and lay it out along the counter next to the man's bowl of soup. The old man sits down and devours both his soup and both halves of the long loaf. The manager now thinks he'll get the answer he has been looking for. When the old man comes up to pay for his meal, the manager asks, “How was your meal TODAY, sir?” The old man replies, “The soup was good as usual, but I see you are back to serving only two slices of bread.”

I wonder sometimes if Jesus ever feels like that diner manager. Jesus comes into our world by the will of his Father and lives like one of us so he completely understands what we need to live and thrive. Jesus gives the most precious gift of all – his own body – so that our deepest needs might be filled. Then he asks us, “How was your meal?” How we answer says a lot about our level of gratitude. Are we, like the man in the story, never satisfied, even with the wild abundance of God's grace? “This is good, Jesus, but you could give a little more.” That more could be any number of things – stuff, security, a crystal ball that shows the future: what the world tells us we need to be happy and less stressed.

But Jesus says, “I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever and the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Do we respond as those always looking for more? “This is good, Jesus, but...” Or do we let our hearts fill with the love that Jesus pours into them, aware that we can never thank him enough for what he has done for us? “This is good, Jesus!”

It is possible to turn our hearts from always seeking more to seeing what has already been poured into them, so abundantly that they overflow. Rabbi Harold Kushner writes, “Gratitude is the fundamental religious emotion. It is where religion begins in the human heart. Gratitude, the awareness that life has given you a wonderful bounty, is an emotion of which all people should be capable.” It is possible, Kushner says, for all of us to cultivate the spirit of gratitude. Gratitude is rooted in the sense that life is a gift that comes to us, not by our own efforts, but from God. When we come before God with thankful hearts, something happens to us. We begin to look at the world differently, grateful for all that God has provided. As simple as this seems, it can be difficult for God's people to do.

Kushner has some ideas about why this might be. One is a sense of entitlement. If we have grown up believing that we deserve only the best, we will respond to every gift, whether from God or from friends, like the petulant child who examines a new toy and complains, “I want the new model!” Such people, like the man in the diner, measure their wealth not by what they have but by what they lack. Then, Kushner suggests, there are people who have trouble feeling grateful, who cannot bring themselves to utter the words, “thank you,” becaue they need to feel self-sufficient. Being on the receiving end of a gift makes them feel weak and needy. These are the people who continually say, “I don't need anybody. I can take care of myself!”

Here is the truth that defines us all: We have been blessed beyond measure by a generous God, not because we deserve it but because God is love that flows without end. None of us can make it on our own – we need one another just as much as we need God. Cultivating a spirit of gratitude moves us to respond to God with our thanks and our trust, so that others might know God's generosity as it flows though us.

“I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

Paul tells us on what we must feed in order to build up the body of Christ, so it is as strong and robust as it can be. Paul says we feed on the bread that gives life to the world. We feed on truth telling. We feed on reconciliation with loved ones and with enemies, on honesty, on building up instead of tearing down. As the body of Christ, we feed on grace, kindness and tenderness. We feed on forgiveness because we have been forgiven. What do we not feed on; what do we avoid taking in to our own bodies and souls? We do not feed on anger that feeds on itself. We do not feed on evil talk, bitterness or slander.

You and I, the body of Christ, feed on the bread of life for life, health and salvation. When you come to Christ's table today, think about what you are feeding on and what you are not. Be grateful for a love that can change your heart and mind and body, a love that fills your deepest hunger and thirst. A love that moves you to care about the hunger and thirst of others. A love that is changing this world, one slice of delicious, life-giving bread at a time.

Amen.

*Pentecost 12B*

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*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

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