

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15 ~ John 6:22-35

Trust Your Hunger

10th Sunday after Pentecost ~ Sacrament of Holy Communion ~ August 1, 2021

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Introduction to Scripture:

So, what happened next? We don't often get "the day after" story, but today we do. The day *after* the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 from one boy's lunch. Apparently, the crowd hung around, waiting for more. "Where did he go?" "I don't know. Let's try Capernaum—that's where he went after he turned those six jars of water into crazy amounts of the finest wine." "Yeah, let's try there." "I'm hungry already...I wonder what he's serving for lunch, today."

Communion Meditation:

When Michael Pollan came out with his book *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*, he simplified the often confusing and over complexified terrain of healthy eating into three basic rules: (1) Eat food. (2) Mostly plants. (3) Not too much. That's it, just seven words. Pollan's manual quickly became a best seller because he managed to boil healthy eating down to just seven words. His whole book is an easy 137 page read, with very large type. He breaks down his three rules with sixty-four rules of what to do and not to do when it comes to choosing, preparing, and eating food. Rule #2, "Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food." And rule #13 "Eat only foods that will eventually rot." Bad news: that means Hostess Twinkies are off the list. Thankfully his final rule #64 is: "Break the rules once in a while." Yes, I learned a lot about food and eating from this book.ⁱ

What may surprise you, is that we have a food manual right here in every pew that we read from every Sunday. Yes, AKA, The Holy Bible. As Lauren Winner, theologian and spiritual writer, says in her book titled, *Wearing God*, "It would not be a gross exaggeration to say that the Bible is a culinary manual, concerned from start to finish about how to eat, what to eat, when to eat." Food is the first way the Bible shows that God intends to provide for humanity: all those seed-bearing plants and trees with fruit in the Garden of Eden given to Adam and Eve to eat. And food is the shorthand for our disobedience, the shorthand for all the ways we have moved far away from God: Adam and Eve eat the wrong thing, in the wrong way... The dietary codes show God's interest in the quotidian details of people's lives ...Food accompanies hospitality. Food carries memory, food protects us, "thou preparest a Table before me in the presence of my enemies." God becomes food, as in today's story... Jesus calls himself, "the bread of life." And food will become sacrament in the Holy Communion we will share together here today.ⁱⁱ

We may wish that our food manual, the Bible, could be summed up in three rules, or seven words, too. However, unlike Pollan's *Food Rules*, our Bible, contains 66 books written by multiple people over two millennia. And as much as we cherish it, love it and live by it, let's be honest: the Bible can be confusing and hard to understand. As a beloved, wise Presbyterian pastor and mentor friend of ours, Robert E. Jones, once said not long before his passing, "don't you wish sometimes Jesus could have been a little clearer about what he meant?"

We have a lot of stuff going on that needs clear answers. We have questions that are tying us up in knots. We have burdens so wearisome it is hard to get out of bed some mornings. We are so done with this pandemic, with confusing directives and changing information. And yet the Delta variant is roaring back. We want the fires burning in the west, and the destructive flooding in Europe to stop. We wonder how on earth can we save our earth from dying on our watch. We ask when will our congress get down to the business of governing and actually pass legislation that could move our country forward?

As we prepare to approach the Table this morning, with all our questions and burdens, I have good news for you. I believe Jesus *did* give us a food rule to live by that is easy to remember. A food rule that is clear and life-giving. When the crowd pleaded, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus answered, "I am the bread of life." He invited them all, the entire crowd saying essentially, "Come to me, hungry as you are, and you will be filled. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, like the I fed many of you were just yesterday by the Sea of Tiberius." In other words, trust your hunger for God. Trust your hunger for God, and you will be satisfied. In Matthew 5:6 he said it like this, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Yes, that hunger is a gift. And hunger is something we can easily understand.

Here's the thing, as Marjorie Thompson write: "God's love lies at the root of our hunger for God. Love is God's hunger for relationship with us. Has it ever occurred to us that God is starved for our companionship?"ⁱⁱⁱ That's right, we are hungry for God *and so is* God hungry for us. Our Bible is the food story that teaches us about the longing and loving between God and us, Creator and creatures. We know how hard it is to wait for the one we love and long for. And John didn't make us wait until Jesus' last food story on earth, what we now call "the Last Supper" to feast on the idea of Jesus as the Bread of Life.

In the other three gospels, it is not until the last Supper that Jesus says to his twelve disciples at the table, "this bread, this is my body, broken for you." But in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells a huge crowd, toward the beginning of his ministry, that he is the Bread of Life. This teaching, after he had given thanks, and broken, and distributed the five loaves to five thousand. In John's gospel we do not get that language at the Last Supper. The language of the Eucharist, comes much earlier. Why is that important to us today? I take away from this an strong invitation to feed on the Bread of life as we go. Bread for the journey, as we go. Especially when the journey is difficult or perilous. As it had become for the Johannine community by the time this gospel war written for them, close to the turn of the first century. Following Christ was risky business at that point. Understanding Christ as Manna connected them to their understanding of God as provision in the past, present and unknown future, no matter how perilous.

Manna was the food God provided for Israel while they wandered in the desert, far from home and safety. Psyche A. Williams-Forson, an American scholar, professor, and writer from Virginia, in her book titled, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*, described a piece of food history that was new to me. She explains about how black women packed up shoe box lunches for family members who were setting off on a trip. "These box

lunches... helped African Americans navigate the hostile landscape of the Jim Crow South, where few restaurants would serve them.” She tells a story about Norma Jean and Carole Darden, written in their cookbook-memoir, *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences*, “The Darden sisters recall how exciting it was to stay up late the night before a trip and help their mother pack the box lunches, which contained a bounty of goodies: fried chicken, peanut butter and jelly, deviled eggs, chocolate layer cake, nuts, raisins, and cheese...Even as young girls, the Darden’s knew these lunches were about traversing dangerous terrain.”

“These trips took place during the fifties, and one never knew what dangers or insults would be encountered along the way. Racist policies loomed like unidentified monsters in our childish imagination and in reality. After the New Jersey Turnpike ended, we would have to be on the alert for the unexpected. So, as we approached that last Howard Johnson’s before Delaware, our father would make his inevitable announcement that we had to get out, stretch our legs, and go to the bathroom, whether we wanted to or not. This was a ritualized part of the trip, for, although there would be many restaurants along the route, this was the last one that didn’t offer segregated facilities. From this point on, we pulled out our trusty shoe box lunches.”^{iv}

Don’t these shoebox lunches sound like manna? And in turn, Jesus? This is the kind of bread Jesus connected himself to in John 6. The bread that comes down from heaven, the bread of God that gives life to the world, in the very midst of peril and struggle. Yes, Manna was journeying bread... Jesus as manna, “bread that sustains oppressed people on their journey through an unwelcoming land,” as Winner summed up this story.

Just a few weeks ago, when I was in Glacier Park vacationing being “Nana,” I helped our three-year old grandchild Isabel, as we were making our way along a treacherous mountain trail. The footing was a bit tricky and she became wary. So, I took her hand and said, “Trust me.” To which Isabel replied point blank, “I *don’t* trust you.” That took me back. Later I asked her mom, Emily, (our eldest daughter) about this conversation. Emily had heard her say this before to other grownups and surmised that Izzy doesn’t really understand what the word “trust” means. But she has observed that people say “Trust me,” to her when she is supposed to do something hard, something she doesn’t want to do, or something that seems scary. Therefore, in her three-year old mind, “trust me” means “do the hard thing you don’t want to do.”

If you find it hard to really trust God, perhaps Rule #1 in our Bible; if you feel like saying to God, “I don’t trust you.” Then do this: Trust your hunger for God. And God’s hunger for you. And come to the Table, ready for today’s lunch, that is here for all of us, and for the life of the world. Amen.

ⁱ Michael Pollan, *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*, (Penguin Books: New York, NY, 2009), Introduction XV, pp. 7, 29, 139.

ⁱⁱ<https://imagejournal.org/article/bread/>, Lauren F. Winner's opening sentence of Bread and Vine chapter in *Wearing God: Clothing, Laughter, Fire, and Other Overlooked Ways of Meeting God*, (HarperOne: San Francisco: CA, 2015), pp. 92-95.

ⁱⁱⁱ Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 1995 & 2014), p.12.

^{iv}Ibid, Lauren F. Winner, *Wearing God*.