

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 7, 2018
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You Are What You Eat

Lord Jesus, be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture, and in the breaking of bread. Amen.

Perhaps you've heard the phrase "you are what you eat" made famous by nutritionist, Victor Lindhlar in the 1940s. Modern versions of this slogan for healthy living can be found in magazines and diet books which captivate a culture struggling with soaring levels of obesity. While it certainly isn't a bad notion to be more intentional about what we consume, perhaps we need to better understand our hunger. If our hearts are longing for something eternal, filling ourselves with earthly things will ultimately leave us feeling empty. Is it possible that we don't recognize the life and sustenance offered to us in Christ?

Hunger is a basic need that we have all felt on some level. For some it is experienced as existential hunger, a longing for meaning and purpose. For others the hunger is a cry for actual food. In our own neighborhood there are many working poor who cannot keep enough on their tables to adequately feed their families. Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us that when this is the case, mere survival becomes the focus of life.

Today in our gospel we hear a story about feeding at all levels. Jesus appeared to the disciples for the third time after his resurrection. This day he met them on the beach. Many of the disciples had scattered and returned to their trades following the overwhelming events of Jesus' death and resurrection. They were confused and afraid, seeking some sense of normalcy. Jesus called to the fishermen to meet him at the charcoal fire and share breakfast with him. Initially they didn't recognize Jesus, but he gave them fish and bread and began to teach, and they knew it was their Lord.

Simon Peter had warmed his hands over a charcoal fire once before, when he denied knowing Jesus three times. Imagine the shame he felt seeing Jesus again. But Jesus offered him a threefold opportunity to affirm his love, redeeming his aching spirit. This healing not only restored Peter's sense of belonging, but also commissioned him for service. Jesus' response to Peter's confessions of love was simple and direct. Tend my sheep, be a leader, look out for others. Devote yourself to this community. He charged his followers to care for others as a means of expressing their love for him. Do you love me? Feed my lambs.

Likewise we come to this table sometimes confused and overwhelmed by the events of our lives. We too are hungry for belonging and purpose. Perhaps some of us struggle to meet the physical needs of our families. When we come to this table to be fed by the Bread of life, we are filled with Christ's love, so that we can be food for the world. Like Simon Peter, no matter how far we stray, Jesus calls us to receive his redemption and grace, to be equipped and sent. Jesus and his teachings are to be consumed, integrated in us, so that we may live our faith. We are in fact to be what we eat, the bread of life given for the world.

This year at Holy Cross we hope to live into our theme, Faith is a verb. We are exploring the myriad of ways that Christ calls us to be sustenance for others. I urge you to consider the manner in which your life reflects a calling. It begins with recognizing our own hunger, seeking Christ for our needs and accepting the grace offered to us. Then we are equipped and sent to serve the needs of others.

We chose the word feed as our verb of the week, just after the word welcome, because that is what Jesus did. He invited strangers and outcasts and those who would be followers to his table, and he fed them. Here at Holy Cross we are about the feeding and care of souls intricately wrapped in welcome, inclusion and sharing. We offer fellowship and food and learning as a way of saying, this is a place of nourishment, this is a place of God's abundance!

When Jesus asks us, "Do you love me?" he wants us to answer him in kindness, generosity, patience, forgiveness, tending his sheep, feeding his lambs. It is a paradox, when we reach beyond our own needs by turning our concerns outward, we often manifest our own healing. Feeding others compassionately even when our tank is low is the miracle that transforms our hearts from human scarcity to God's abundance.

I recall twenty five years ago, spending several Sunday afternoons in the kitchen of our church, making soup and sandwiches to be delivered to the hotels that housed homeless guests. My children had never experienced a lack of food or shelter and as they worked alongside us, they participated in the fun and fellowship of working as a group. But it was in the experience of delivering these meals and meeting the people that was transformative in their hearts. Though sometimes painful to see the eyes of hungry children as we knocked at their doors, my children remember to this day the feeling of sharing what they had. To actually feed one who is hungry not only heals the receiver, but the giver as well. Meeting human scarcity with God's abundance is our calling and our joy.

So on this day we might consider what we are consuming to fill our hunger. Are we spent by the busyness of our days, or are we tapping into that wellspring God gives us in relationship? Are we ravenous for a sense of belonging and purpose? What in our lives is satiating that need? No matter how far we stray, the good shepherd continues to call to us, to welcome and feed us, offering hope and redemption.

You are invited to come to this table to be fed and nourished by the body and blood of Christ, to receive strength for the journey. Then Christ will send you in whatever way, to feed others. We cannot do this on our own, but Christ in us can. If we are what we eat, we are the body of Christ that offers God's abundant hope. Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Amen.