

## **Bread from Heaven**

John 6: 24-35, Psalm 100

Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service-UMC

Nov 24, 2019 3pm

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### *John 6: 24-35*

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 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. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” 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.

### *Psalm 100*

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

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Sour-cream-coffee-cake. Those four simple words take me back to every single holiday morning of my childhood. My Mom made her famous Sour Cream Coffee Cake the day before a holiday so the sounds of the walnuts being pounded down into little bits and then the smell of the cinnamon baking were two clear signs that the special day we had been anticipating and counting down to was finally just hours away. Each holiday breakfast had the same special, delicious taste, so that now even the words themselves take me back to the dining room of that long-ago home and time.

I have my Mom’s recipe of course, but it isn’t the same. It’s not that it doesn’t smell or taste good when I bake it. No, no matter how much love, care, attention and skill duplication I include in my baking, it just isn’t the same. It is not THE sour cream coffee cake that my Mom made. I savor the taste in my memory since I can no longer do so on my taste buds.

We all have those special foods from the holidays of our childhoods, as well as from right now. We each have those particular foods that we are looking forward to on our Thanksgiving tables now just days away. Turkey, gravy, stuffing, cranberry sauce, green bean casserole, creamy butternut squash, and oh, all those pies! In the midst of family, friends and football, we will gather for our day of giving thanks for all that we have, and our thanks will be surrounded by food. Whether our celebrations will look like a Norman Rockwell painting, or include those special-yet-often-awkward turns around the table to express our particular gratitudes this year or be gatherings in which we have a list of conversation topics and opinions best kept to ourselves, we will have a day where food is at the center of all our thankfulness, all of our gratitude.

We will be mindful of the blessings, relationships and experiences in our lives. There will be names and memories that bring a smile to our face, just as those that will bring a tear to our eye. Our gratitude, our thanksgiving, will be about the past, the present and hopes for the future. Thanksgiving is a day when whether or not the words of the psalm might actually echo within us or are the emotions we feel, we know that we are God's people. In spirit we enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. We give thanks to him, blessing his name for the abundant blessings we have received. Yes, the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

As we gather around the table with loved ones, and perhaps special guests, or new family members, there is another guest who will join every one of our tables. And this guest has already offered the greatest gifts and blessings for which to be thankful—the gifts of redemption, peace forgiveness, healing and eternal life.

Jesus Christ joins every Christian table, not just on Thanksgiving or other holidays when we are more aware of his presence, but every single day. On a day when our giving of thanks is wrapped up in the food that we share, Jesus encourages us to look beyond the bounty of the food on our plates and to the bread of life, our daily bread, the bread from heaven, that gives life to the world. Jesus our table guest invites us to remember that we are not to 'work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.' Jesus lovingly says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

On Thanksgiving, on each day, Jesus calls us to recognize that no matter how grateful we are for what we have, for our possessions, for our health, for our homes, for our family and friends, all things that are important in our lives are all things that will perish. John's gospel does not ask us to name what we are thankful for, but rather to deeply, prayerfully, genuinely, thankfully reflect on the meaning of our faith to receive the true bread of heaven which gives life to the world, to receive the bread from heaven into our hearts every day that we receive not only at our Thanksgiving tables, but at the Communion tables in our churches, at the baptismal font, and in our Christian living.

The crowds who had followed Jesus to Capernum were some of the 5000 who just the day before had been fed from what had been five loaves of barley bread and two fish. Now they sought more from this rabbi who had fed them, nurtured them, in body and spirit. Now they wondered, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

As that crowd learned, as we have learned as Christians, believing in Jesus means that we live as Jesus taught, that we reach out to those who hunger and thirst in body and spirit as we offer both thankfulness and faith. We can express our thanksgiving for the food we eat, but that will not feed the hungry. We can express our thanksgiving for our homes, but that will not house

the homeless. We can express our thanksgiving for our closet full of warm clothes but that will not clothe the poor family shivering in a NH winter. We can express our thanksgiving for the jobs we have, the work we are able to do, but that will not heal economic disparity. It is only by feasting on the bread of heaven that hunger, homelessness and poverty will one day be healed.

As we soon share in our offering of food and monetary gifts, we will be living as the body of Christ for others, and that my friends, is Thanksgiving. Caring for others in the name of the bread of heaven is to live out the gospel as Jesus would have us do.

As we break bread this Thanksgiving around our own tables, may we who follow in the way of Jesus be moved beyond thankfulness for turkey, home, health, and family. May we be moved to receive and share the bread of heaven, which gives life to the world.

Friends, may the blessing and peace of Christ, the bread of heaven, be known in and through you on every single day that you are giving thanks. Amen.