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## *Sacred Community and the Bread of Life*

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler**  
**Homecoming Sunday – Proper 14, the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B**

On Homecoming Sunday, welcome to the Cathedral of St. Philip, where we enjoy so much. We enjoy sacred worship. We enjoy sacred music. We enjoy beauty and love here. We enjoy mission and service here! And we enjoy each other! Sacred Community! It is time to enjoy again!

Most of us even enjoy the bible. At least, I sure do. It is the seed of our sacred story. For several Sundays this August, we are hearing from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, which contains three very familiar stories: the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walking on water, and this curious conversation that we heard today about Jesus claiming he is the “Bread of Life.”

I want to talk about bread this morning. And I want to talk about sacred community.

I smile at this entire sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, because everybody seems to be looking for something. At the feeding of the five thousand, one of Jesus’s disciples asks, “where are we going to get something to eat for all these people?” After the miraculous feeding, Jesus is looking for solitude, and he slips away by himself.

A confusion develops about where everybody is. The large group of people is looking for Jesus. He seems to be going back and forth across the Sea of Galilee, and no one knows how. So, the people go back and forth, Then, Jesus is actually walking across the water, I think looking for people. Where is everybody?

Maybe it was like church attendance in the middle of the summer. Where is everybody?

When the crowd finds Jesus, they ask, “Rabbi, how did you get here?” It is then that Jesus begins his declaration about bread. “You seek me because you had something to eat, (and you thought I was a wonder-worker). Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.” (John 6:27) “I am the bread of life,” Jesus says.

“Wait a minute,” the people say, “isn’t this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” Jesus continues, “whoever believes has eternal life...your ancestors ate the manna from the wilderness, and they died. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” (John 6:35, 42, 49, 51).

They are looking for what bread is, what true bread is. And here in sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus will deliver a sermon about bread. Maybe his text is those familiar words of Deuteronomy, 8:3, “God fed you with manna which you did not understand, nor did your ancestors understand, that He might make you realize that one does not live by bread alone, but one lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.” Jesus is about to preach on that kind of bread this morning.

Jesus surely remembers Proverbs 9:5, where the person of Wisdom issues an invitation: “Come, eat of my bread; drink of the wine I have mixed.” Jesus is that Wisdom.

Jesus surely remembers the old prophet, Isaiah, who lamented the foolishness of those who buy things that are not real bread,

*Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;*

*and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food. (Isaiah 55:1-2)*

Isaiah continued with words that we now include in a canticle called the Second Song of Isaiah. Some of us pray it regularly in the office of Morning Prayer:

*10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)*

Personally, I sang that canticle a lot this past summer, these words from Isaiah 55, *"Seek the Lord while he wills to be found, call upon him when he draws near."* I was looking for something too, this past month. Some of you know that I was quite ill. I was looking for health. And peace, and sleep, and food!

I needed physical food, for sure. But I was also looking for a deeper kind of bread, the kind of bread that Jesus offered the crowds, when they were willing to "seek the Lord while he wills to be found."

Bread. Living bread. The bread of life. We pray for it without realizing we are praying. Most of us in this room do know at least one prayer, whether we realize it or not. It is the Lord's Prayer. One of its most familiar lines is, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Give us this day our daily bread! The Lord's prayer, which we all know so well, may very well have to do with physical bread and physical sustenance. But it also has to do with spiritual bread and spiritual sustenance. We need good teaching, good story, good revelation. It is not just physical food we eat together; we eat the words and life of Jesus.

All of us need living bread. And we are looking for it, whether we acknowledge that search or not. Oh, we look all over the place for it! We pay money in search of what we think can give us life. Is it sports that gives us life? Is it the latest music craze? Is it the frantic scrolling across our little screens that gives us life? Is it the latest social club? Is it politics that gives us life? The drama of our present American politics does, indeed, seek to control all our attention, all the time! Does that give us life?

As important as those things can be, and as fun as those things can be, they cannot give us the bread that Jesus offers, the bread that comes down from heaven, the bread of life.

Dear friends, the bread of life is the reason we come to church each Sunday. It is the reason families desire to have their children baptized into this community. This church, this Cathedral of St. Philip, is a place of life, a place where living bread is served. Come, says Wisdom, "eat of my bread, drink of the wine I have mixed."

We gather around the teaching of Jesus, just as the crowds searched for him long ago. It is the teaching of Jesus gives us eternal life! It does not perish! His are words of life, the words of love, justice, and peace! They are why we approach this church every week, and every day. They are why we approach this altar every week, and some of us every day. There is something eternal and life-giving here. It is Jesus, the Bread of Life!

It has been said by cultural observers these days, that what our culture is seeking is community. We are a lonely people, they say, especially after the prison and fear of the covid pandemic. I think those observers are right. So, we in the church often speak of our church as community. "We are a community," we shout out.

And so we are. But we are a distinctive kind of community here at church. We are sacred community! It is not just ordinary community that people crave. The world craves a community that is transcendent! We need a community that transports us beyond ourselves, into the realm of heavenly places.

The Cathedral of St. Philip is a sacred community, centered on the words of Jesus, eating the bread of life, living into the traditions of wise scripture and story. The bible is spoken here!

Sacred community takes us outside of ourselves, putting us in touch with a reality that is larger and deeper and higher than we are. We all need the experience of a Reality, which we can humbly acknowledge is larger than we ourselves. That is sacred. That is God.

We joyfully baptize people not simply into community, but into sacred community. And we joyfully welcome people to this altar for holy communion, the Eucharist, each Sunday. This eucharistic meal is the bread of life and the cup of salvation. A joyful meal!

But it is not the Eucharist unless we remember, unless we remember and rehearse sacred story! That is why the priest prays the long prayer over the bread and wine. That prayer is what we call the salvation narrative. The story. We long to hear the sacred story!

If we desire to be a sacred community, we always remember our sacred story. Our sacred story recognizes the holy above, and it recognizes the holy around us. The holy might be the stranger sitting beside us. The holy might be the person whose parents we know, the carpenter's son. The holy might well be our family and friends who care for us when we are ill.

Thank you. Thanks to each of you this morning for being a part of this sacred community, living into Jesus, the Bread of Life.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip