

11B Pentecost, Proper 13

August 5, 2008

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

Moses said, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat".

Ephesians 4:14-25

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self... and to clothe yourselves with the new self.

John 6:24-35

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life... It is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

In a family, at bedtime, we said good night, and went to bed; no hug, no kiss. When I went to scout camp every summer, or on a weekend trip, no hugs. Hugs just weren't part of the culture of my family when I was growing up. Then when I was 28 years old I attended a Cursillo weekend. I came home from that experience with a driving need to show more of how I felt. The next time I visited my dad in northern New York, I remember walking up to him; he held out his hand to shake hands, "hello". I hugged him. My dad's eyes got big - he didn't say a word - I checked to make sure he was still breathing. That hug changed us. My dad and I hugged a lot after that. My family hugged a lot after that. That hug transformed our relationship as family.

Abraham Maslow was a humanist psychologist in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He defined a "hierarchy of needs" that he said motivates human beings. His pyramid is ordered like this: Physiological needs (hunger, thirst, oxygen, sleep); safety needs; belongingness and love needs; esteem needs; and at the top of the pyramid, self-actualization needs. Maslow's analysis was that the lower needs must be met before we can look to higher needs.

It seems clear from today's Hebrew scripture that the Israelites would completely agree with Maslow. God wanted to be in relationship with Israel; but the Israelites were in the desert, away from the protection of their Egyptian masters, and what they cared about most was food: not eternity.

So God gave them manna to eat. That strange food appearing every morning was a clear sign that God was with them; there was no confusion about the source. But the real miracle wasn't the bread – it was the transformation that happened. The manna and quail turned the barren desert into a place of life. With manna it was possible for them to travel through the desert for 40 years, winding their way through the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan. God used those 40 years to transform them into a community. They started out in Egypt as a squabbling group of slaves; they arrived at the Promised Land transformed into the people of God.

Through their daily gathering up of quail and manna, Israel learned to depend on God every new day. The manna stopped the day that Israel ate from the crops of the Promised Land (Joshua 5:12). Manna had brought transformation of their relationship with God; and it taught daily dependence on God.

With Jesus' teaching after his feeding of the 5,000, he was taking that same sort of miracle to a higher level. He explained that feeding 5,000 people with physical bread was done as a sign of who he was. It was not done as a show of power that would entertain them; or impress them. But the people only saw that they were given food for their stomachs. Jesus was offering them a physical sign that he was one with God: that God was with them. But this time the food being offered would not only last a day, and it would not only fill the stomach. The transformation he came to accomplish is for us to become a new creation – a new 'self' – changed for eternity. The hunger Jesus came to satisfy is not for food and water at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It is the hunger for relationship with God, a need at the very top of Maslow's pyramid. Jesus is the sustenance that pulls us up to be more than we are; offers us connection with our creator; guides us with something outside ourselves; something bigger and better than ourselves.

Paul explains that our old desires and inclinations are part of our "old self". By believing in Jesus we are clothed with a "new self". Paul says that the key to this change is the work of having faith in the One God sent to us - Jesus.

So has your faith made your life a different life? (different friends, vocabulary, goals?)

Does this faith community help you live your life different? (trust, caring, worship?)

These are important questions to answer.

- If the answer is yes, you are feeding yourself on more than physical bread, just to get to the next day. You are making sure you see spiritual growth.
- If the answer is no, if your life isn't different, you aren't reaching for the bread that really counts. There is so much more to live for...

In the Lord's Prayer we say, "Give us this day our daily bread". This is not just praying for our physical necessities, but for that daily nourishment of divine encounter with God.

Jesus' body and blood in the Holy Eucharist are the never ending, never failing offer from Jesus that he is the bread of our life. We are offered that Holy meal as nourishment for our spiritual lives, to transform and recharge our relationship with God - every time we partake of it. This is a transformation bigger than a family learning to hug; this is how we live our eternity with God – starting today.

May our loving God continually transform us and those we love to be more faithful believers and followers of Jesus; may we offer our lives to God with a daily dependence on His presence and guidance. Lord, share with us the bread that gives life to the world. Amen.