

“Are You Hungry?”

Rev. Erika Martinez-Flores
John 6.24-35
August 1st, 2021.
Westby UMC & Viroqua UMC

The food / drink theme appears frequently in the Gospel of John (as well as in Luke's). John informs us of six meals, including the one in the epilogue of his gospel (John 2: 1-11; 4: 4-42; 6: 1-14; 12: 1-8; 13: 1-14; and 21 : 1-14). Furthermore, the evangelist compares and presents Jesus with metaphors referring to food / drink. Jesus is: "the bread of life" (Jn 6:35, 48), the source of "living water" (Jn 4:10), and the "Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29, 36). In all the texts where the theme of food / drink appears, the community or the interlocutors of Jesus have difficulties to understand the true meaning and the commitment to justice and solidarity that the “scandalous” meals of Jesus demand.

Our Gospel this week narrates the people's reunion with Jesus in Capernaum and a scandalous dialogue about bread, which culminates in the gathering of the people around Jesus and the epiphanic proclamation of Jesus as “bread of life”. In the first part of the gospel, people ask Jesus: "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Although the people are not yet disciples of Jesus — they have not embarked with Jesus — they appear to be in a position to walk the path of discipleship.

In answer to the question of these anonymous people, Jesus reveals to them the true reason for their fruitless search for him: to have had enough of perishable bread. These people do a "theology of the navel" (as Professor Manuel Villalobos calls it); They are only interested in their stomach, and to be able to be satisfied with the "bread of death," with "the food that perishes." This type of community is incapable of assuming the liberating proposal ("bread of life") that Jesus offers.

This "navel theology" is not enough. It is necessary to discover and decipher the signs that Jesus is showing and leaving in the precarious lives of people who have nothing, especially those who always live "on the other shore," "on the other side of the sea."

Jesus, as a good rabbi, arouses in people an eager desire for the “everlasting bread” that he offers, but for the miracle of the bread of life to take place, “the works of God” must be done (vv. 28-29). "Putting the works of God into practice" consists of adhering in solidarity to the liberating action of God, recognizing the "works of God in creation."

Therefore, the bread of life that Jesus offers does not happen by magic or by human whims; it requires faith and total adherence to the proposal of Jesus. Unfortunately, people, it seems, are neither willing nor ready to receive and believe in Jesus, "the Messenger of God" (v. 29). Just as the people of Israel received the manna in the desert that "God himself gave them to eat." For Jesus, eating that kind of manna / bread in the desert is no guarantee of discipleship. It is necessary to go to him and believe in him as authentic "bread of life."

In this world where there is so much poverty, suffering and so much hunger, Jesus' proposal to present himself as “the bread of life” is provocative and revolutionary because the bread that Jesus offers is a symbol of life, of joy, of peace, of harmony, of well-being, and above all of the solidary presence of God in the midst of a hungry community.

In the Eucharist, in the celebration of Holy Communion, Jesus made bread, perishable, precarious and vulnerable, enters into solidarity with a hungry world, lacking the possibility of having life, here and now. Jesus, like his Father, is not a God who dwells in "the mythical heaven" or who is lost in deserts of death. Nor is Jesus a God of indecipherable mysteries or of liturgical norms disconnected from the community. On the contrary, Jesus becomes bread, food, food for all those who seek him.

Jesus is true bread of life and calls believers to carry out "the works of God:" give life to the woman who feels unworthy for being a single mother and having been excluded from communion, to embrace with love her brother who is not they feel welcome in our celebration due to their differences, walking with the migrant whose work makes our lives possible, and caring for the child who is abused. Only if we embrace the one who is “different,” the one who suffers, the one who is hungry and the person who fights for

justice, will we be like Jesus: bread, blessed, taken, broken, and distributed, capable of giving life.

Jesus feeds those who are hungry when he says, "I am the bread of life" (v. 35). My question is: What makes a congregation vibrant or non-vibrant? Men and women, old people, young people and children who were fed cross the Sea of Galilee and go in search of the one who fed them, and Jesus does not retreat to the mountain (v. 15). Because he is the food. The first step of the followers of Jesus is the search for the one who fed them. The second step is to go with your doubts, fears or questions and talk to Jesus. They present themselves as they are, and Jesus listens to them and does not reject them, because Jesus is the perfect love and motivates them to believe. And the third step is to attend to Jesus' recommendation to act. There are three important steps also in congregational life: receiving the Word, believing in the Word, and as a result of love for God, working from day to day. In this way, congregational life has a resonance in the Word and is reproduced around the Word. Everything is possible if we let Jesus be the bread of life.

By reminding us that Jesus presented himself as the bread of life, John is telling us that the heart of a congregation is Jesus, the living Word who comes to feed us and call us to believe and act.