

Children's Story
August 2, 2009

Give out a bag of popcorn giving a few kernels to each child. Then say, "I've run out!" Then ask, "What do you do when you run out of food at home?"

You can ask your parents for more food. You can go to the grocery store. You can make more popcorn if you had another bag.

Then talk about countries where there are no grocery stores. Ask, "What do they do when they run out of food?"

Ask for help from other countries. Would they ask God for help?

Do you think that the world could ever run out of God like the world can run out of food? In the Bible story the people were looking for Jesus to feed them bread and Jesus told them to ask for the food that never runs out. "What kind of food never runs out?" Jesus said he was the bread of life. Do you think Jesus could be the food that never runs out?

What would you do if you needed more of God? Would you go to a store? Would you come to church? Would you ask your parents? Can we ever run out of God?

No God is everywhere. We can never run out of God. If we ask, God is always there for us. God will always be the food that never runs out.

The Food that Endures 9 Pentecost B

Food shortages are a bit surreal for the United States –yet many are still alive to remember bread lines. At the time of writing this message Tornado warnings appeared on our television. Natural disaster makes one think about those needs even more. Hunger appeals to the most basic of needs. Energy, food and healthcare are among the big three critical shortages Americans face. Hearing that eighteen thousand Americans die each year for lack of adequate healthcare is equally frightening. My government insurance has only paid half of my recent hospitalization. Now I wait to see what the private insurance will pay. Questions about personal security are in our headlines everyday.

The five thousand fed by Jesus were seeking signs of security as well. Signs and wonders that Jesus was the Messiah, but most of all they were hungry and looking for bread to eat. It was quite natural in a world where there were so many people and not enough food. Those fed were once hungry, and they were not about to let Jesus get out of their sights for long. They put out search parties. They sought for the seeker of men.

They found the Rabbi – and put a question to Him. “When did you get here?” This is a strange question for hungry people that just had their bellies filled. Do you suppose it was about arrival time that they were asking Him? Jesus knew what they wanted: signs, wonders... but mostly food. Our Lord addressed the food factor. “You want me because you filled yourselves with loaves.” It was true. For the people it was about hunger.

Yet the seeker of men turned their search for food into a teaching moment. He presented them with a menu choice: food that perishes or food that endures. In a desert climate there was no food that in time would not rot. Since salt among the poor was scarce there would not have been enough of that precious commodity to preserve food. To what kind of food would Jesus be referring?

Food that lasts is a symbol for Jesus Himself. He used the familiar "Food that feeds the body" to talk about food for the soul.

For the first week after surgery I had little desire for food. No appetite. I lost weight. My blood pressure dropped 20 points. I wanted to be out of pain. When I called for help with the pain after coming home, the only offers I got from doctors and nurses was more of the same. Stay the course. Continue to take the medicine. You are normal. We encourage you. Stay the course. I now look back, with hindsight, I might add, that I was being fed food for my soul when I wanted an immediate fix!

While talk of feeding our soul sounds good, remember, it may not always feel good! The Dean Healthcare staff had a longer range perspective than I. I wanted immediate relief to my need but the medical staff knew better than I. Jesus had a longer range view than His people did. Our Lord could see eternity. The hungry once fed would get hungry again. He wanted them to have enduring hope that would feed

them a lot longer than one day. That would feed their hearts and souls even when they had nothing else.

“Work ... for the food that endures for eternity,” says Jesus. How do we do these works? The verbs get changed as the explanation continues in Jesus sermon. He goes from doing to being. From doing this work of bread making, He switches to "just being" by believing. Believing in the One God has sent, *is* the work of God! The people are confused, so they think Jesus must be talking about doing another sign or wonder. “Which one will it be this time Jesus?” they said. They are not connecting the dots. They are desperate hungry people. That’s just the point. They were not ready to be hungry enough for the true bread – the food that God sent from heaven. The true bread was standing right there with them. Do you think we might have responded differently? If we had nothing, could we still be strong in the spirit of Christ...filled with His everlasting food?

Jesus is bread from heaven that gives life to the world. In a hungry world, where thousands die of hunger and starvation every day, where children may go to school all day on one meal if they have help, where in the US, grocery shelves at best have 2 days of food on them; the bread that gives life makes us think hard at what is truly important in life. The basics soon become much more precious when we think this way. Only when we can think about that possibility of such loss can we perhaps just begin to plumb the depths of Jesus words: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

Such hunger and thirst is a tough one to understand. We have an abundance of both kinds of want. What do these words of our Lord say then, if anything? Perhaps it means that if we ask only for our physical needs to be met, we are not giving full honor to our Savior, and we will ever be in want. For only in Christ have we all that we need. I invite you ponder this with me in our hearts. Amen.