

## August 18 2024 Bread of Life 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT

(Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 117 (seasonal); Revelation 10:5-11; John 6: 24-35, 51-55)

What was one of the best decisions you've made in your life – whatever the eventual outcome? What was one choice that you made that was life-giving, good for you, for your family or community?

When I was first confirmed a Catholic in the mid-1980s I took the importance of Eucharist to heart. For me, this was Jesus' deathbed request to remember him in the breaking of the bread. I had just heard words of wisdom from my brother on his deathbed. I chose to receive every day.

When I was working on my master's degree in the 1990s I was attending daily mass and I was pretty sure that as I got busy with the writing of my thesis, that I would not have time to do both my academic work and keep my commitment to go to church every day. So, I stopped attending mass. That one week away did not improve my writing at all. In fact, I got more done when I was receiving Eucharist daily. So I made the decision to step back into the routine of this ritual of remembering Christ in the breaking of bread.

What was the benefit of a daily regimen of bread which is Christ? Today's readings give us an answer.

I am grateful to Mary L. Coloe<sup>1</sup> and her commentary<sup>2</sup> on John's gospel for many of the ideas I'm about to share.

We hear "I am the bread of life come down from heaven, from the spirit-world." Jesus is human and something more. As are we. In the first part of what is called the "Bread of Life Discourse," that is, chapter 6 in John's gospel, Jesus is speaking in metaphor. He echoes the feminine Wisdom of Proverbs, in our first reading, who invites everyone to come to her table. She offers a way of life which is tuned into Creator's presence in the world. The Divine is a source of life, a way of seeing and embracing terms of relationship that sustain and open people to wisdom.

The metaphor of the bread that comes down from heaven is very special to the Jewish people of Jesus' time. It is rooted in the Exodus story of God feeding the people manna in the desert, a physical bread from heaven, which the crowd, who's gathered around Jesus, remembers and mentions when they ask for a sign. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, at the time of the writing of John's gospel, the expression "bread from heaven" had become a metaphor for wisdom. Manna had been a ready-to-eat, mystery food that fell overnight and was something special<sup>3</sup>. They want that something special from Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary L. Coloe, "Session 7: Receiving the Bread of Life" *Broken Bay Bible Conference*, 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1r8CtTbEKU&t=2034s>

<sup>2</sup> Mary L. Coloe *Wisdom Commentary: John 1-10*, ed. Mary Ann Beavis and series Barbara E. Reid (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press) 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Menachem Posner. "What Does 'Manna' Mean?"

[https://chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/1410463/jewish/What-Does-Manna-Mean.htm](https://chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1410463/jewish/What-Does-Manna-Mean.htm) (Accessed August 17).

He appeals to the teaching of wisdom at the start of the discourse. His teaching shifts from metaphor to a sacramental sense of Eucharist when they ask to be given the “true” bread that he describes from his Father. Jesus then describes himself as the “bread come down from heaven” and invites them to a banquet of his body, his flesh. What we are getting from the gospel is a teaching of Eucharist.

Bread that is life for eternity is not unlike love. Love also moves through time and space. One tangible way we can experience love is through touch. That might be a hug, a kiss or by sharing the food of our tables.

Jesus takes the wisdom of eternal life, which is his way of being, and transforms it into a tangible sacrament that can be held in the hand. It can be broken, shared and consumed. It is this ritual with bread that transcends the present. “This bread gives the life of beauty and harmony to the world.” “Eternity life,” Mary L. Coloe calls it. “The bread of life is the way of life.” We can receive it. We can share it.

Theologically today, we hear in Proverbs that the promise of Lady Wisdom is that when you are hungry for wisdom—how to see the world, how to respond, how to know goodness and beauty in painful situations—you call out to her. When you experience this kind of hunger for truth, for comfort, Wisdom will be there with her spiritual table fully spread for you to come and eat, time and time again. Come when you get hungry and thirsty again. That is her promise that she will be there open to meeting our needs.

In today’s gospel, Coloe points out that Jesus’ message, is even more powerful than Lady Wisdom’s message. “The ones who come to me will hunger no more,” Jesus says. “The ones who trust me will thirst no more.”

Jesus offers his body, his presence, as a way of life that can be ours. He is the connection of the present world to the spirit-world, hence Coloe’s phrase “Eternity Life” or “living into the very life of God.” Jesus’ invitation, is to trust him. To trust the ritual of gathering, remembering, breaking and sharing bread. Because in that action, even as a kiss embodies love, Eucharist embodies Christ’s presence—a divine wisdom shared among us. A trust in this ritual from Christ can inform our thinking, our daily actions, our decision making.

What upsets some of the people who turn away from the teaching, is the word Jesus uses to describe his body. Fr. Ron Rolheiser has pointed out that it is translated into Greek as SARX. This is not the vibrant SOMA or the soulful PNEUMA. SARX is mortal flesh. It is vulnerable to illness, destined to rot. Jesus’ resurrection, however, transformed his SARX which suffered and died, into a wisdom-infused gift through the ritual of Eucharist. When we come to this table, we come like the early christians of John’s community, open to a way of life fostered by the bread of life—not almighty, but humble and nourishing.

And we do it often, because, as John tells us in the Book of Revelation, the sweetness of life does turn sour or bitter.

Our words of remembering and action of our consecration feed us wisdom for the difficult journey.

So when we seek wisdom in our decision-making whether we sense a holy WORD like “this child needs to be loved” or “it is time to move” or “feed the hungry,” “quit that job,” “plant a garden” and the message is sweet, firm, or it resonates as true, and we follow willingly, often optimistically—it is also clear from the passage in Revelation, the great revealing, that such a word can turn sour in our belly. The journey ahead will be challenged by painful periods of time, rough roads, barricades. However, such impediments will not stop the bread of life from accompanying us, from providing, in real terms “eternity life,” for the journey – a spiritual roadside assistance from an all-loving source.

It is our job to call out. To seek wisdom. To eat the bread of life, in trust of Christ’s offer to share his flesh as a taste of “eternity life.” When we come to the table, what brings us to trust the unexplainable generosity of wisdom personified in Christ and passed on to us in bread dedicated to be his flesh for the world?

For me, it was a step away and a decision to step back. A life-giving decision.

#### LISTENING QUESTION

What was one of the best decisions you’ve made in your life – whatever the eventual outcome? what choice did you make that was life-giving? Consider Where were you? What affected the choice you made? How has that choice played out for you?