

### **Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15**

*The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.' "And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. The LORD spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."*

### **Psalm 78:23-29**

- 23 So he commanded the clouds above \*  
and opened the doors of heaven.*
- 24 He rained down manna upon them to eat \*  
and gave them grain from heaven.*
- 25 So mortals ate the bread of angels; \*  
he provided for them food enough.*
- 26 He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens \*  
and led out the south wind by his might.*
- 27 He rained down flesh upon them like dust \*  
and winged birds like the sand of the sea.*
- 28 He let it fall in the midst of their camp \*  
and round about their dwellings.*
- 29 So they ate and were well filled, \*  
for he gave them what they craved.*

### **Ephesians 4:1-16**

*I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said,*

*"When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;  
he gave gifts to his people."*

*(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the*

*measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

**John 6:24-35**

*The next day, when the people who remained after the feeding of the five thousand saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

I love the picture Callie sent me a couple of weeks ago. It's a picture of herself and her son Egan who at age 4, wants very much to learn all about this Communion we share, and watched attentively as his Mom made our bread for the first time. I put the picture on our facebook page and it's in our monthly newsletter – go look at it if you haven't seen it yet.

Callie and I had talked. She was a little nervous about this first endeavor. Would it work? Would the bread be good? I knew that I was not going to reassure her with platitudes – And I knew that it would be perfect. The worry is actually a good thing for it meant that Callie was acutely aware of the importance of what she was doing: baking bread for Jesus' table. Using her hands to touch and form and pray in the Bread of Heaven.

I get it. I don't sleep much on Saturday nights. I know the breathtaking awesome sleepless awareness that comes with saying or doing something for God's people – with God – about God.

It's good to be on high alert when we are doing and speaking for God.

I learned to bake bread on a day when I did not have enough money to buy it. For some reason, there was yeast in my refrigerator. And there was flour – some kind of sweetening and a bit of oil or butter – margarine will even do.

We really don't need a whole lot more.

It's thoughtful work – a little painstaking. It requires our attention. I have found there is a sort of lovely forced attentiveness and meditation in the waiting and in the kneading.

It all starts with water – Just plain water. Then there is the yeast – tiny inert cells – alive yet dormant ‘til they fall into the water and soak in the water. In the water, they soften and burst and multiply. And like every living thing, they give off waste. Their waste? Bubbles of gas and alcohol – And in this case, those bubbles will make the bread rise.

Sweetening makes the rise faster and steadier. It’s food and everything needs to be fed. And by the way, the water temperature matters. If it’s too hot – the yeast protects itself and can’t grow. Too cold? It will grow with such slowness.

We don’t add salt at the beginning. That slows the yeast and there’s got to be time for growth before the barriers come.

Next, a little fat is added to make the loaf smooth and moist. And finally, the flour, stirred and then kneaded in. It is in the kneading – the continually work of turning and pushing and stretching – that the bread becomes bread. Some people time it. In time, it becomes something that the baker knows by feel as the gluten fibers yield under pressure, stretching – becoming smooth and strong to form the network that enables the dough to trap tiny yeast bubbles as it rises – Stretching and strengthening under pressure, becoming pliable and soft – and in the heat of the oven, firm and delicious.

The key to bread is balance – too little kneading and the bread can’t hold the bubbles – Too much, and the bubbles are constrained and can’t rise. Balance – life’s giving and taking.

Funny how much we are like even the bread – stretching and strengthening under pressure – becoming part of the network that is humanity as we grow.

We bake – for each other. We feed each other. We give - and we take from each other.

Let’s think about that for a few minutes. Giving – and receiving. The notion of receiving gets the short end of the stick for most of us. After all – we’re tough! We’re powerful! We’re in charge! WE get to make the decisions and of course, we all know, “I can do it myself!”

That flies – much of the time. Yet it’s always a lie. For even if we have what we need, it’s not us – it’s God’s provision. Make no mistake. And if the rest of the world itself and all the people in it were suddenly swept away, so would our ability – and our perception – of independence. We never make it alone. We are all together in this. All the time. We are dependent. The Lakota Sioux have a term for this: *wancantognaka* – The virtue of open-hearted recognition of reliance on others.<sup>i</sup>

It’s a hard one sometimes for us to understand as virtue – this recognition that we can’t always do it all ourselves – that we can’t always be the powerful one. It’s a vulnerability most of us struggle to face. Yet we are always on the seesaw that tips between giving – and taking.

In the Kingdom of God, it’s the melding of generosity and dependence. We are born into this world completely dependent. We survive only through generosity – the feeding and forming of others. While that’s a piece of our lifetime – it’s just a part. For in receiving – in acknowledging our own dependence, if we are to be healthy humans and live into the fullness of our being, we learn generosity. In gratitude, we become generous, like those who care for us when we need it. Like God – the giver of all. And we take see place on the balance that works between strength and weakness in life, caring for others – and relying on others.

I might not be here today without generosity. I have mentioned to some of you that during the Great Depression, my grandfather was killed in an industrial accident. The baskets of food delivered by the city – and Salvation Army Camp that took the five stranded children from my struggling Grandmother for the summer and fed them – and let them get back on their feet, strengthened, able to go on. And having received, they remembered and then fed others during their lives and beyond. It's my story – reminding me that we are all recipients of kindness – of prayer – of food. And so we are all to be givers of the same. We are kneaded into this network – together.

Paul speaks of the network today as we read another chapter of his stunning letter to the churches, through Ephesus. He writes the words of oneness that we affirm as we begin each service of Holy Baptism. And he writes of the diversity that is US – the Body of Christ – as we each do what we are able in the times we are able – for one another and with one another.

*“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift... The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ... speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.”*

In our Baptism, we drop — into the water that is the promise of Life. It's our reminder of God's promise to us that in Jesus, the Bread of Life, we will always receive. Enough for the day. Every day. Like the yeast of our own bread-making, the Water of Baptism awakens us to the life in Jesus that calls us to be the network – kneaded by life's days, joining together to become the network. Each with our own gifts – our own strengths – our own needs. Together, we form the Church. Together we feast on the Body of Christ – and we become the Body of Christ.

And as the Body, we remember that on some days, we are the feeders. On others, we receive. In all, we are woven together, sealed, and blessed in the oil of our Baptismal blessing, fed by the owner of Life itself.

We are the children of God. Forever and ever. **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> Gregory Beabout. Ethics: The Art of Character. New York. Bloomsbury Publishing. 2008. P. 48.