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Communion Meditation

Providence Baptist Church  
Hendersonville, North Carolina

***“What Are You Hungry For?”***

John 6:51-58

Jesus said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” And, “So the one who feeds on me will live because of me.” Jesus is asking us to feed on him, sounds sort of vulturesque to me. Not to mention that he calls us to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Cannibalism? Some early 1<sup>st</sup> century folks thought so.

Once again the lectionary calls us to John 6 and the Living Bread. It seems like the folks who put together the lectionary were anti-Atkins as well.

Are you hungry? Now, I don’t mean you’re already thinking about what we’re going to eat downstairs. I mean hungry for something more in your life that will fill it. What is the bread that you need? “Need” here being the operative word. We may want cinnamon raisin bread or doughnuts for that matter, but perhaps the bread we need is of the 9-grain whole wheat variety.

My guess is that we’ve all been feeding on the wrong things this week. Our diet perhaps was a little lopsided, maybe too much of the bitter herbs, sordid fish, barking back beans. We want to eat the right things, but it’s so much easier to eat comfort food.

Of course we know why we need to eat period. To be nourished, to give energy to our bodies, minds, spirits, to heal/grow our tissues. But usually when we eat we’re not thinking about these things. We just eat because this is how we stop our hunger.

What are some of our hungers? You can think of yours. I know some are recognition, financial stability (when our retirement plans have seen better days), a sense of belonging, happiness, knowing that we’ve made a difference.

Some of our hungers are not based on the Living Bread. But how people see us, our accomplishments. Sometimes I think we don’t even know that we’ve been eating too much candy or French fries or red meat. We don’t even think twice about it. One of the reasons for this is we haven’t realized what we are really hungry for.

It’s amazing how important good food is. For some people they’re dying literally just to get some.

Woodrow Wilson, former US president once said, “In the Lord’s Prayer, the first petition is for daily bread. No one can worship God or love his neighbor on an empty stomach.” We have to be filled with both physical and spiritual food.

This year is an election year in Asheville. And wouldn’t you know it there are some people who are upset that homeless continue to be fed in Pritchard Park on Sunday mornings. There reasons are threefold: 1. It’s messy. 2. People there act

inappropriately to badly. 3. It's crowded. But perhaps they have overlooked this basic principle of Christ: "They were hungry and you fed them." A disabled man gets ready every week two days before this Sunday feeding to make 36 dozen homemade bisquits out of his own pocket. He does this you know why? Not just because there are hungry people in Asheville to feed. But because he's hungry, and this feeds him. As the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev said, "Bread for myself is a material question. Bread for my neighbor is a spiritual one." I would say the lines between material and spiritual become pretty fuzzy. In the act of giving physical bread, bisquits to another, this man is feeding on the Living Bread.

Now don't get me wrong, sometimes the bread of life is hard to swallow. You can even choke on it. Because for the bread to stay fresh, you have to feed it to others. Remember what happened when the Israelites tried to hoard the manna in the wilderness? It became foul and infested with worms. But many times, and I'm guilty of this, we give until we feel good, not necessarily until a need is met. As we know from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, there is a cost of discipleship. There are times when trying to give living manna to others is difficult. It can take countless hours, backbreaking work, or fighting governmental barriers. It may mean facing rejection from the one you are trying to give it to. It may mean realizing you are just as hungry as the person you are feeding.

Jesus knows the cost of being the Bread, come down from heaven. For he says in verse 51, "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the earth." Jesus, willingly chose to have his bread, his body broken—to give to the life of the world—to give so that others could feed and not be hungry any more—to give so that you and I could realize what we are truly hungry for.

For this is why Jesus said he was the bread of Life. Why bread? Because it can be broken and shared. Jesus didn't say, "I am the great philosopher—glean my wisdom." Or "I'm the great rhetorician—memorize my every word." But rather I am the bread of life. He who feeds on me will never be hungry. This bread of Life wants to be ingested—to be experienced—to enter you and change you holistically: physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

When we come to the table, we find what we've been hungry for. For he says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks by blood remains in me." Isn't that what we want? To remain in him.

So when we come to the table this morning we should come hungry and be prepared to be filled. For this is not some anemic cracker but the Bread, the Loaf of Life.

One local pastor was telling me that she had a new congregation member who hadn't been in church much, probably had rarely taken communion, who had come forward to take communion in a recent past Sunday. Now the bread, was a beautiful, homemade, even hot loaf. And when she tore off a piece of bread and ate it the whole congregation could audibly hear, "Uhhh." It was an expression of sheer delight. And the best part,

she said to the one serving the bread, “I have to have more,” and the celebrant wonderfully replied, “There’s always more.” And so, she ripped off another big chunk.

There’s always more at the table of our Lord. That’s the abundance God provides. And wouldn’t we do right by seeking here for the food that we need. That we would with rapture, take off a piece of bread, taste it, and delight in the Living Bread, broken, so that we will never die and never go hungry. So, come forward and take off a big chunk. Feed on the bread—for it’s what you’re really hungry for.