Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 1, 2021

**INTRODUCTION**

*Apparently not satisfied by Jesus' feeding of thousands, some who were there press him for a sign of his power; perhaps it is daily manna they want. As always in John's gospel when people want a sign, Jesus offers himself. He is the bread come from heaven to give life to the world. He calls us to come to him and believe in him, and through that relationship to know the one who sent him.*

**Prayer of the Day**

Gracious Father, your blessed Son came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world. Give us this bread, that he may live in us and we in him, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

O God, eternal goodness, immeasurable love, you place your gifts before us; we eat and are satisfied. Fill us and this world in all its need with the life that comes only from you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**Psalm: Psalm 78:23–29**

***Refrain:*** *The LORD rained down manna upon them to eat. (Ps. 78:24)*

So he commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of heaven.

 **24He rained down manna upon them to eat** **and gave them grain from heaven.**

25So mortals ate the bread of angels; he provided for them food enough.

 **26He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens**

 **and led out the south wind by his might.**

27He rained down flesh upon them like dust and wingéd birds like the sand of the sea.

 **28He let it fall in the midst of their camp** **and round about their dwellings.**

29So they ate and were well filled, for he gave them what they craved.

Lord Jesus Christ, shepherd of your Church, to strengthen our faith and to lead us to the kingdom, you renewed and surpassed the marvels of the old covenant. Through the uncertainties of this earthly journey, lead us home to the everlasting pastures, where we may praise you now and forever. **Amen.**

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**First Lesson: Exodus 16:2–4, 9–15**

*A food crisis becomes a faith crisis for the Israelites in the wilderness. The hungry people forget God's saving work in the exodus, and they wish for the food they had in Egypt. Nevertheless, God miraculously meets their needs, with manna for bread and quail for meat.*

2The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3The 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."

 4Then 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. 9Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" 10And 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. 11The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 12"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.'"

 13In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15When 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.

**Background**

Exodus is the account of the ancestors of Jacob and his sons leaving Egypt. In Hebrew the book is called “These are the names” from the first words in the prologue which refers back to the genealogy in Genesis 48:8-27. The second major theme of the book is God’s giving of the covenant on Sinai and Israel’s formation as a nation; the seminal event in its history.

The text incorporates a variety of independent sources. All the various strains and traditions and laws are joined in a (sort of) coherent narrative around the character of Moses who led Israel out of slavery and into their covenant relationship with YAWH.

The book probably reached its final form in the 6th or 5th century BC – most consider that this took place during the time of the Babylonian Captivity as Israel tried to solidify its identity apart from the land, Jerusalem and the Temple. (primarily Edward Greenstein, Harper Collins Study Bible)

**Verse by Verse**

**2The whole congregation of the Israelites** *– literary exaggeration.*

Excursus on Israelite Identity

*Israelite identity is complex. Their founding family comes from what will become Babylonia (and later Iraq). They practice “internal” marriage, a euphemism for incest. Abraham marries his (half-) sister (Genesis 20:12); his uncle Nahor marries a niece, Milcah (Genesis 11:27, 29). The desire to marry only within the family sends Abraham’s servant in search of a blood relative, Rebekah, in Genesis 20:4. Her branch of the family is described as “Aramean,” (Genesis 25:20). In a generation marriage patterns change, Judah and Simeon produce heirs with Canaanite women, Tamar and her unnamed sister-in-law (Genesis 38:2 and 46:10), and Joseph marries and fathers children with an Egyptian woman, Asenath (Genesis 41:50). Joseph’s half-Egyptian children Ephraim and Manasseh will essentially become tribes in their own right. The scholarly designation for the ethnicity of ancient Israel is for this and other reasons, “Afro-Asiatic.” To this multicultural mix is added an unknown number of persons of unknown ethnicity and nationality who escaped Egypt with Israel, (A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. Exodus 12:38). (Working Preacher – Wil Gafney, Brite Divinity School)*

**complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.**  – *the Israelites had left Elim (of the 12 springs - 15:27) and moved into the Wilderness of Sin (this location is often placed south in the Sinai peninsula, but there is no concrete evidence to support this), one and a half months after leaving Egypt (16:1). The LORD has already overthrown the Egyptians at the Reed Sea and provided drinkable water for them at Marah (15:22-25)*

*In some rabbinic readings only the non-Israelite elements murmur.*

 **3The 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."** *This is their 7th stop and 3rd complaint*

*It may be helpful to remember that those miracles were now more than six weeks past according to the chronology of v 1. Also six weeks behind them was the oasis of Elim with fresh water and date-laden palm trees. Six weeks later, their promised land was nowhere in sight and their provisions were being consumed at an alarming rate. And, the only thing they could see the pillar of cloud and fire was leading them to was more sand. (Working Preacher)*

 **4Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain** *(cause to fall - the LORD caused to fall hail on Egypt in the 7th plague – 9:18)* **bread** *(Heb.* Lechem*is both “bread” and “food.”)* **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** *(Heb. torah)* **or not.**

 **9Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'"** *Aaron acts as spokesman for Moses (4:10-16) One commentator speculates the “draw near to the LORD” may be an anachronistic reference to the tabernacle which is not yet constructed.*

**10And 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.** *“glory” – manifestation of God’s presence, possibly related to the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Also 16:7, 24:16-17, 40:34-35 in Exodus.*

**11The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 12"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.'"** *“you shall know” precedes acts of power incl. turning the Nile to blood (7:17)*

 **13In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.** *Quails migrate across the Red Sea to Europe in the spring, landing for rest at night*

**14When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?"** *possibly rendered in Aramaic, “manna”* **For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.**

**Theology:** *Psalm 103:13: As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.* Even when they whine and complain! God, like a loving, if occasionally exasperated parent, hears the prayers and the complaints of the people and acts, not as they might expect or wish, but as God will. God did not abandon the Israelites in their crises of faith and in their times of doubt. He has not/does not/will not abandon us, either.

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**Second Lesson: Ephesians 4:1–16**

*Christians share fundamental unity and diversity. Our unity consists in the one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. Our diversity is expressed in various forms of ministry, whose goal is equipping the saints and building up Christ's one body.*

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

 7But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8Therefore it is said,

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

 9(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) 11The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13until 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. 14We 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. 15But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16from 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.

**Background**

Ephesians is not considered Pauline, although it may have been written by a disciple after Paul’s death, probably in the last third of the first century AD. It is directed to believers who had been Gentiles. It lacks the eschatological urgency of the accepted Pauline letters, possibly as a way of responding to the “delay” in Christ’s return. This section begins a series of ethical instructions firmly based on the preceding three chapters in which the author has laid out the new reality that in Jesus God has broken down the “wall” between Jew and Gentile. The letter speaks directly to believers throughout ancient Asia Minor. These cities had a diversity of population, trade, religious groups, and social classes typical of a Greco-Roman city. There is no internal evidence to connect the letter to Ephesus, but Ephesus held an important place in Asia Minor as city of substantial population, the location of the great temple of Artemis, and the place where great Asian games were held. During the reign of Augustus (after 27 BCE) Ephesus was made the proconsular capital city of the Roman province of Asia. *(cf Acts 19)*

**Verse by Verse**

**therefore,** *“Therefore” connects this to what precedes. Chs. 1-3 are described as “doxological rather than dogmatic” and so the connection of the “ethical” chs. 4-6 is with the praise of God rather than a doctrine of God. (Marcus Barth – Anchor Bible – BTW this brief book of Ephesians has 2, count ‘em, TWO volumes in the Anchor Bible!!)*

**I, the prisoner in the Lord,** *3:1 - I Paul am a prisoner for (or of) Christ Jesus… in this case “Kyrio*” *Lord is used. Barth suggests the implication is “in the service of the Lord.”*

**beg** *(Gk. parakalo - summon, invite, call on for help, implies a more urgent request. Same root as “paraklete”)*

**you -***2nd person plural – you-all – the group, not an individual*

**to lead** *(Gk. peripatesai* - *“to walk)”* **a life worthy of the calling** *(vocation)* **to which you have been called,**

*I want to walk worthy, Lord, my calling to fulfill – “Order My Steps” – Burleigh*

**2with all humility and gentleness, with patience, -** *a “catalogue” of virtues akin to the fruits of the Spirit as listed in Gal.5:22-23, or Col. 3:12 - a standard teaching tool in the rhetoric of the day.*

**bearing with –** *(Gk. anechomenoi* – *enduring, bring patient with, giving patient attention to)*

**one another in love,** *- (Gk. agape - despite Barth who says this is “brotherly love” – philios).*

**3making every effort –** *(Gk. spoudazontes* *- more urgent than this sounds- Barth renders it “take pains to” in the sense of wholehearted effort – engaging all the powers of the whole person!)*

**To maintain** *– not attain - the gift that follows is already bestowed - Barth*

**the unity –** *(Gk. henoteta -* *occurs only twice in the NT – here and 4:13)*

**of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** *This unity is expanded in the following verses:*

**4There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,** *(v. 1)*

 **5one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**

*believers are called to a unity that is created by and grows in love. The unity is based not in similarity of gifts, but in connections created by the Spirit given and shared in baptism.*

**7But each of us was given grace** *(Gk. charis*) **according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

*The NRSV translates the “de” at the beginning of v. 7 [as “but” – other trans. “moreover”] giving it a full adversative force.*

 **8Therefore it is said,**

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

*Psalm 68:18 - You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train
and receiving gifts from people, even from those who rebel against the Lord GOD's abiding there. (Note: here it is God who receives gifts from the people)*

 **9(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)** *early Christian exegesis, focusing on key words in the quotation.*

**11The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers …** *Lists of gifts also I Cor. 12:28-30, Romans 12:6-8 – Stressing leadership within the Christian community.*

**12to equip** *(Gk. katartismon*- *this is a noun, not a verb – meaning equipping, perfecting, making adequate)*

**the saints for the work of ministry,** *(Gk. diakonias - serving)*

**for building up the body of Christ,** *the gifts are given for the edification of the whole community, not for individual achievement.*

 **13until all of us come to the unity** *second NT use of this word*

**of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity,** *(Gk. andra teleion*- *a full-grown man)*

**to the measure of the full stature of Christ.** *The faith in and knowledge of Christ unify the community*

**14We must no longer be children,** *(Gk. nepioi -literally infants)* **tossed to and fro** *(Gk. klydonizomenoi* **-** *as by waves on**the sea) -* **and blown about by every wind of doctrine,** *- “teaching”* **by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.**

**15But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up** *(Gk. auxesomen* *– growth, increase – used in NT to refer to the Church)***in every way into him who is the head** *- of the Church -* **, into Christ,**

**16from whom the whole body, joined** *(Gk. synarmologoumenon*– *fit together as parts of a building or body)*

 **and knit together** *(Gk. syymbibazomenon**– cause to stand together; unite, be joined) -*  **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.** ἀγάπῃ

**Theology: Believers are called to bear with one another in love so that the Church – the body of Christ – is built up in love; working together in the unity of Christ in love. The love of God in Christ unifies us and negates all parties and factions that rebel against and work to nullify that unity. Amen! Let it be so!**

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**Gospel: John 6:24–35**

*Many of the five thousand people Jesus fed in the wilderness continued to follow him throughout the countryside. Jesus challenges them to consider the real nature of their quest.*

24So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

 25When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26Jesus 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. 27Do 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." 28Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30So 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? 31Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32Then 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. 33For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

 35Jesus 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.

**Background**

This passage comes from the “Book of Signs” as Raymond Brown (Anchor Bible) calls the first 12 chapters of John and is the teaching that follows the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Chapter 6 is one of the longest, and this pericope in its heart is the first section of the “Bread Sermon” which continues to v.59!

**Verse by Verse**

**24So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.** *This is a follow-up to the walking on water episode in vv.16-21*

**25When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"**

*The first of three questions. Frederick Dale Bruner (The Gospel of John, A Commentary) writes: If any in the now inquiring crowd should subsequently learn the real answer to their question in the deep, original sense of John’s Gospel (Answer: in the Incarnation from heaven – 1:14) they might, we could hope, have bowed in worship…*

**26Jesus answered them, "Very truly,** *(Gk. Amen, amen*– *always precedes a “dominical saying” (of the Lord) in Bruner’s words, “I want to tell you something important.”*

**I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.**

**27Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life,**

**which the Son of Man will give you.** *Son of Man – Daniel 7:13-14 – some interpretations make this term simply a reference to a human being, like Ezekiel’s “mortal man”, but at least one commentator (H. Thyen) holds that this term is John’s intentional substitute for the “Word made flesh” (1:14)*

**For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."** *(Gk. esphragisen* **–** *sealed -- aorist, once and for all)*

*Bruner quotes Luther: God has only one seal, and this He has set on Christ. On Him alone He has bestowed the Holy Spirit, so that all [people] should look only to Him. All of Holy Writ points solely to Him, attesting the He alone possesses both seal and letter: for He is the exemplar, made, give, and offered to be our sole help.*

*Bruner - The human person knows deep down inside oneself that the food that gives us this earthly life is not lastingly satisfying. We long for a deeper quality of life. The Gospel of John is one repeated promise after another to provide this life.*

*Bruner refers to Isaiah 55 with the following parallels:*

 *Isaiah 55:1-2 John 6:27*

1. *2 kinds of food – satisfying and not 2 kinds of food – perishable and not*
2. *No money or labor for that which does not satisfy no work for the food that perishes*
3. *Food which satisfies is given without price the Son of Man gives the food which does not perish*

**28Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"** *The second question*

*Bruner: Why do they pass so quickly over the mysterious Giver and go so quickly to the equally mysterious work they should do? Does their question illustrate our human penchant for thinking* “it’s all up to us” *or that “*what we do is more important than anything else”? *Note that the question is about “works” plural*

**29Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God,** *note that the reply is the “work” singular of God; not our works, but God’s work.*

*Raymond Brown (Anchor Bible) Obtaining eternal life is not a question of works as if faith did not matter, nor is it a question of faith without works. Rather, having faith is a work; indeed it is the all-important work of God. Brown quotes Bultmann here – this believing is not so much a work done by [people] as it is submission to God’s work in Jesus.*

**that you believe in** *(Gk. pisteuete – have faith**- Bruner prefers “trust”)* **him whom he has sent."**

*Brunner – Even the saving “work” we do is a work that God does for, in and through us…God does the one great work of trust, and we simply (but really) bring this already worked and working trust back to his Son.*

**30So they said to him, "What sign** *(Gk. semion)* **are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"** *The third question. “he” in the Bible quotes is not Moses, but God.* Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you (Ex. 16:4)

Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven;
he rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven.
Mortals ate of the bread of angels; he sent them food in abundance. (Psalm 78:23-25)

**32Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly,** *(Gk. Amen, amen* – *again, announcing something important!)*

**I tell you, it was not Moses who gave** *past tense – over and done with*

**you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives** *present tense – Bruner “is giving”*

**you the true bread from heaven.**

**33For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."**

*Bruner: 1) It was not Moses (wrong subject)*

 *2) who gave (wrong tense)*

 *3) bread from heaven (wrong direct object)*

 *4) to you (insufficient indirect object*

 *Oh no!*

1. *It is my Father (correct subject)*
2. *who is giving (correct verb tense)*
3. *the real bread out of heaven (correct direct object)*
4. *to the whole world (correct indirect object)*

**34They said to him, "Sir,** *(Gk. Kyrie*  - *Lord)*

**give us this bread always."** *– Is this John’s “give us this day our daily bread”?*

 **35Jesus said to them, "I AM** *Jesus’ first “I AM” in John’s Gospel*

**the bread of life.**  *Not just “bread”, but the bread of life*

**Whoever** *(Gk. ho – the one)* **comes to me will never be hungry,** *Bruner – the Greek singular definite article “ho” makes Jesus’ promise wonderfully “personal,” even invitational, definitely existential… just come, and then come again, and then come again… “come and see” – 1:39*

**and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.**

*Bruner – John’s Jesus clearly wants to put the bar here as low as possible (come, believe/trust), so that we may live as authentically as possible, and so that he may reach his highest possible goal with human lives – people living with him. We are all he wants. He is all we need. Just come to him; just trust him; that’s all; that’s enough. The gospel has been spoken.*

**Theology: It’s so simple: Come. Believe. But we want to make it harder. We want to try to earn;**

**we want to try to deserve what Jesus gives freely to us, to all.**

***“If our love were but more simple, we should take him at his word*”**

**– Frederick William Faber**

 **ReadingPsalm**[**2nd
Reading**](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2599)

**Commentary on John 6:24-35 - Craig A. Satterlee**

The hymn powerfully portrays the plight of so many of God’s children: “Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry for shelter and for bread to eat, and never live before they die” (“The Church of Christ in Every Age” - Evangelical Lutheran Worship #729).

*And never live before they die*. The reality becomes all the more poignant when I allow myself to linger on and ponder the word *children*. How many kids go hungry in the world and in our nation, in your community and even your congregation? With the crowd chasing after Jesus, I want a sign that God is doing something new -- that human-created circumstances and conditions cannot undermine or negate.

As someone familiar with how Bible stories end, I am sometimes impatient with the crowd chasing after Jesus. How can people bother Jesus for another round of loaves and fishes, when Jesus is going to serve up his very life on a cross to draw all people to himself and take away our sin and the sin of the world? With Jesus, I find myself thinking, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Humanity will give you” (John 6:27).

Then I contemplate this story through the realities of our world. As long lines for humanitarian aid demonstrate, eating your fill one day does not mean that you will not be hungry the next. When there is no food, and you do not know how you will sustain your life today, what is the point of working for eternity? Think parents whisking their children out of their beds in Egypt -- or Central America -- on the promise of a better life, only to watch their kids starve to death (or get blown to bits) in the desert.

Some things are worth complaining to God about. Sometimes, asking God for assurance that God is still with us is understandable, even appropriate. When Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (John 6:26), I do not think Jesus was scolding the crowd for seeking bread because they were hungry. I think Jesus was disappointed that the crowd did not expect more, not more bread but something more. Perhaps Jesus was thinking more about ending hunger than serving up more bread. Moses and Aaron, not to mention God, may have been disappointed that Israel did not expect more, not an Egyptian deli in the desert, but that the God who delivered them from slavery would also sustain them in the desert.

This is easy to see and even easier to say because we know the end of God’s story, for us and for the world, as well as for the people in the Bible -- manna, quail, promised land; suffering, death, resurrection; water, word, table; abundant and eternal life. So why don’t *we* expect more from God? Why do we settle for signs of God’s grace -- bread from whatever source -- rather than seeking and expecting God’s immortal love for us? Could it be that we work for the food that perishes, rather than the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Humanity gives us, because we are unwilling or unable to name what we truly hunger for and seek? Why do you suppose this is? Fear of being disappointed, a need to somehow protect God, and clarity that we are not deserving all come to mind.

And why do we assume that we have to *work* to get what we truly hunger for and seek? With the crowd, we assume that the key question when we encounter God is, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" (John 6:28) Along with, “How much is enough?” and “How do we make sure we do it right?” These questions press even harder when the stakes are war and peace, safety and security, food, water, and health care, the economy and the environment. "What must we do to perform the works of God?"

Jesus responds to us as he did the crowd: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent" (John 6:29). To believe is to trust that God is doing something new that human-created conditions and circumstances cannot undermine or negate. To believe is to submit everything, even our highest-stake issues, to God’s saving work in Jesus. To believe is not so much what we do as being open to what God is doing.

Of course, being open to what God is doing and submitting everything to Jesus means we might not do what is wise, practical, advantageous, safe. In fact, being open to God and submitting everything to Jesus means that our doing is less important because we are not in charge, let alone in control.

Now if we are going to give up all control, we need some assurance, some guarantee. Perhaps we can understand the crowd asking, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?” (John 6:30). Since the crowd is looking for a political king like David and a prophet like Moses, what better sign than manna in the wilderness? Moses gave manna to their ancestors, and their ancestors believed. But Jesus points out that God rather than Moses fed the people in the wilderness. What made the feeding a sign was not the manna, but that the manna came down from heaven. The manna was only an appetizer for the true bread that came down from heaven, Jesus, who gives life through his teaching and his flesh, because God sent Jesus.

Jesus is the bread that fulfills all our hunger and thirst. Jesus frees us to follow him not to achieve self-satisfaction, not to get anything that is in it for us, not even to attain or maintain peace of mind. Jesus frees us to embrace God’s redeeming will to restore the cosmos to what God created and humanity to what God intends. Such faith does not mean separating the spiritual out of the social. It means putting God rather than us at the center of both. When we do, we can and will expect more.