

A Monthly Meal
August 2, 2015
Ephesians 4:1-6 (NRSV)
John 6:24-35 (The Message)

Ephesians 4:1-6

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.

Our second reading is found in the sixth chapter of John beginning in the twenty-fourth verse. As is often the case, people have many questions for Jesus. He has answers that don't exactly answer what is asked, but instead offer what the questioners need.

As we count ourselves among those with questions for this one we call Jesus, let us listen now for the voice of our Still Speaking God.

So when the crowd realized he was gone and wasn't coming back, they piled into the Tiberias boats and headed for Capernaum, looking for Jesus. When they found him back across the sea, they said, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered, "You've come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs - and for free. "Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last."

To that they said, "Well, what do we do then to get in on God's works?"

Jesus said, "Throw your lot in with the One that God has sent. That kind of a commitment gets you in on God's works."

They waffled: "Why don't you give us a clue about who you are, just a hint of what's going on? When we see what's up, we'll commit ourselves. Show us what you can do. Moses fed our

ancestors with bread in the desert. It says so in the Scriptures: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus responded, "The real significance of that Scripture is not that Moses gave you bread from heaven but that my Father is right now offering you bread from heaven, the real bread. The Bread of God came down out of heaven and is giving life to the world."

They jumped at that: "Master, give us this bread, now and forever!"

Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever.

May God bless the reading and hearing of these wise words, and let us pray. Perspective Changing God, help us to expand our appetites from simply seeking to fill our stomachs or trying to find the finest of foods to hungering and thirsting for righteousness and to accepting the gifts of God set before us on the Table this morning. Take and use my words to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

Some people like to watch birds. Other people like to watch the water. Still others like to watch television or computer screens. I like to watch people. It is a habit I carry with me wherever I go, including here in our sacred space.

I should, perhaps, begin with a word of thanks to the person or people who chose to place the pastor's chair in two different but equally wonderful people watching positions over the course of the year. From my seat I can see so much.

I try to find the liturgist and to get to my seat as soon as our musicians begin playing each Sunday. I do my best to not only scan the pews, but to visually welcome each worshipper. And, typically as I am doing so others are arriving.

While there is no wrong time to arrive, the later you come the more likely it is I will observe your entry. In fact, I can recall a number of late arrivers in each of the congregations I served. One man, however, was different from the rest.

The first time I noticed this man he came into the sanctuary fifteen or more minutes into the service. I saw him exit during the last hymn.

When I looked for him the following week and the week after, he was nowhere to be found.

He did, however, come back. Each time he came he was the last person to enter the sanctuary and one of the first to leave. He wasn't a member, and didn't leave his name or contact information on the fellowship pad.

I was determined to meet this mystery man. One Sunday when he was present I left the chancel well before the final hymn and went to the side door where I knew he would exit. I greeted him and stepped outside to extend our conversation and to get to know something of this man.

It turned out that he was an irregular visitor to our church and a few others. He chose to attend worship somewhere once each month in order to receive the monthly meal. The Communion experience was a central part of his identity as a follower of the Way of Jesus. It was the spiritual food that empowered him for the journey of faith and the journey of life for the month ahead.

As you got ready for church this morning many of you came expecting to receive a monthly meal, but few, if any, of you came today exclusively because the table would be set.

In a few minutes, you will have an opportunity to partake of the sacrament we often call Communion or Holy Communion, and one that others call the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. You will not be forced to participate, but you will be invited to and welcomed at the table.

So, I wonder, why do you take Communion? Is it just because it happens to be offered or do you have other reasons?

A few years ago, a group of Christian bloggers were asked to answer this question in 100 words or less.¹ While I re-read all of the responses in preparing for this message, there are three I want you to hear and to consider. These three women approach the subject from different perspectives: the first is a pastor, the second a theological student, and the third a professor.

To ensure I quote each person properly, I will read their words.

¹ Patheos. "Why I Take Communion," October 1, 2010. Available at <<http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Why-I-Take-Communion.html>>

First, from Danielle Shroyer

I take communion because I am hungry for a place of radical acceptance, where the tragedies and hopes of life are confronted. I am hungry for food that reminds me God's love is so abundant it feeds the whole world.

I take communion because I have been hungry for the wrong things. I have wanted to name God all by myself, to exclude others, to feast on my own apathy and be left to my own devices.

At the table, I am reminded of my hunger -- and of the Only One whose bread does not leave me empty.

Second, Amy Julia Becker

I've been to seminary and heard the debates about symbolism and transubstantiation and everything in between. I've read the Bible stories. I've meditated upon the idea of receiving Jesus' body and blood, broken and shed for me.

I've been to high church celebrations of the mass and low church services where bread is dipped in grape juice. And I can't say I've figured out why we do it, why I do it.

It remains a mystery. A commandment. A gift. A time of giving and receiving, of humbling myself, of being blessed. A reminder that I am broken, and beloved.

Third, Monica Coleman

Once a month, I gather with community -- some are friends; some I barely know. We tell stories of how God brought us out of difficult times and into freedom.

This is bread for our journey together.

We sit at the table with people who have hurt us. We trust that God will give us the grace we need to be more than we are.

We drink in these promises of God.

Once a month, I gather in community to learn friendship, fellowship and forgiveness from what Jesus did

. . . and this kind of work requires a meal.

Friends, you have heard a great deal about the sacrament of Communion through the experiences of an unnamed man and the words of three wise women. We know what they think. I wonder what it is that motivates you.

This morning I invite you to answer or at least to work toward constructing your own answer to the question the bloggers were asked:

Why do you take communion?

Amen.