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Grace and Holy Trinity Church  
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John 6:51-58

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Jesus, how can bread live forever?

Inquiring minds want to know because more often than not a loaf of bread gets moldy before we eat it in our house so unless Jesus means that we grow our own penicillin, the Reinholz' are not eating much live bread ?

Maybe instead living bread is unbaked, like a sourdough starter, which can be fed for centuries. A friend of mine, a retired priest in Bethlehem, tells me she's used starter that is over 200 years old. That's a long time to keep something edible. And I'm not so sure I would eat bread if I knew that it was around in any form before my grandmother was conceived.

I am leery of food that may have expired. Having grown up with refrigeration, knowing much of the food I eat stays "fresh" longer and than what my ancestors did because now we use all kinds of herbicides and pesticides, preservatives and chemicals to keep food for as long as we can. Yet knowing that in many cultures throughout the world, food is kept, in an edible state, in essence keeping it alive, by encouraging it to ferment. This is what creates fine wine, vinegar, kimchi, natto, sauerkraut blue cheese and so much more.

What something starts out as changes, and becomes something else, allowing it to live for much longer than it may have in its "fresh" state.

But bread that is living, is not the same as food that is preserved.

Jesus isn't talking about salt tack, or sourdough, or fermented food stuffs when he talks about the Bread of Life.

Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth,  
is talking about the body and blood of God on Earth,

his own body and blood,  
his own physical being.

So what does Jesus' physical form have to do with preservation, fermentation and change?

There is actually an interesting mistranslation of pickling and baptizing which I was reminded of this week when thinking about all of this bread and food stuff.

When I was at a retreat a few years ago a seminary classmate of mine talked about this mistranslation and said that it was actually fortuitous that there was messy scholarship around this because it provides us with a great metaphor for what occurs in baptism, even if it isn't perfect etymologically, because like you can't unpickle a cucumber, you can't un-baptize a Christian.

It makes sense because baptismo means to be baptized but bapto means to be pickled.

When reflecting on these two acts, however they are similar in one specific way, they can't be undone. Once a cucumber is pickled soaked in vinegar, salt and spices it is always a pickle it cannot go back to being a cucumber.

When a person is baptized they are soaked in the waters of repentance, renewal and resurrection, and there is nothing that they can do that can break the covenant of belonging to the Family of God, once a Christian always a Christian. Once a pickle always a pickle.

The choice of baptism is our own, even if, as many of us in the Episcopal tradition are baptized as infants, at the request of our parents and sponsors and godparents. The choices Christians make to engage with the sacrament of Holy Communion, daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally, some only once or twice a year, or once in a lifetime.

I can and do make the choice of how often I want to consume the body and blood of Christ, but regardless of how often I do come to this table, this offer is a standing invitation.

However this table is not the only table at which I am fed, nor are clergy and eucharistic ministers the only ones who handle the bread of life.

Consider for a moment what and where you will eat this week? Is there a meal plan at home? When looking at the calendar and seeing who has practice, and who has work, and who has meetings is there a plan concerning who will eat where, and when? Meals however can become routine. Mac and cheese, hot dogs, quesadillas, and fruit are always part of my plan.

It is similar in God's house, if we confine it to these 4 walls and these short hours on Sunday morning, it can feel like the Eucharist is routine.

Especially in a tradition which is based on the notion of common prayer, using the same words and the same prayers and the same water and wine and bread and linens, can feel boring, normal, ordinary.

But loving Jesus, following Jesus, consuming Jesus, and sharing Jesus with one another is anything but routine.

This is not the bread that our ancestors ate.

This is new bread.

This is not the prayers our ancestors prayed,  
these are new prayers.

This is not the faith of our fathers,  
this is our faith.

When I consider that I do not only hunger and thirst after bread and water, in the same way that I am not only fed at this table. Then my understanding of today's Gospel message expands to be not only a routine aspect of my life as a Christian but to be different which is what Jesus himself intended.

What I seek in my life, what I hunger and thirst after, above and beyond my physical needs are justice and peace.

I live a pretty comfortable life, as I mentioned at the beginning of my sermon, I have enough food that I can throw away half a loaf of bread without blinking an eye. I know that isn't true for everyone.

I know students who are struggling to make ends meet until loan checks come through, and members of the Friday congregation whose food stamps just don't make it to the end of the month, and elderly folks on fixed incomes who decide between food and prescriptions and children on subsidized lunch programs that didn't run through the summer.

When I stand with that mild loaf of bread in my hand I hear my grandmother telling me to eat all my broccoli because there are starving people in Africa, and I pause and say a prayer because while I know that is true, I also know this doesn't have to be.

There is enough.

There is enough food in the world.

What there is a lack of in the world is not food, or water, or energy or weapons but what is missing is compassion, and inquiry, and advocacy, and rebellion which the Church encourages in its people, and with which we could feed the hungry and shelter the homeless and clothe the naked and protect the vulnerable.

So how can the Church share what it has with the world?

How does the bread of life get distributed beyond these walls and beyond this table?

Each and every Christian has a role to play in sharing the bread and each and every one of us can embody different ministerial roles in what Bishop Curry calls the Jesus Movement.

No one is expected to fulfill the same role every moment of their lives, humanity is constantly changing.

The man who was drug to farm aid with his girlfriend in the 80's can be a legal counsel for the Standing Rock Tribes in 2016.

The mother of 2 who sends invites to fundraisers she can't afford to attend and follows protests on livestream could have been knocking on doors to register voters in the 90s.

The grandmother who is hosting the community watch event tomorrow night may have been making cheese sandwiches in Selma the day Jonathan Merrick Daniels was killed.

The student who walked out as an act of rebellion in response to school violence may be a supreme court justice in 30 years time.

Jesus provides an example for all of humanity to fulfill all of the parts of the Church, all of the the parts of the Jesus Movement. Which requires like all movements the role of helpers, organizers, advocates, and rebels<sup>1</sup>.

Jesus the rebel : raged about the injustice of it all and overturned the tables.

Jesus the advocate: spoke for the voiceless the widows and orphans and those who were left on the margins.

Jesus the organizer: brought together both sides of an issue and formed a community of unlikely allies:

tax collectors and zealots,

men and women,

rich and poor,

they were all at the table.

Jesus the advocate: spoke in parables so everyone could understand but also taught the law to the learned Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus the helper: healed the sick and cures the lame and feeds the hungry.

Jesus the Man, and Jesus the movement shows the kingdom of God to the world.

Each Christian has a role to play in the pursuit of justice following in the footsteps of Jesus but all of us can recognize

I am not Jesus,                    nor do I want to be,

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander accessed [https://www.vanderbilt.edu/ctp/The\\_New\\_Jim\\_Crow.pdf](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/ctp/The_New_Jim_Crow.pdf) on 16 August 2018.

I don't want to be the bread of life,  
but I do want to share it with the world.

And right now even though I have been called to be a leader in this movement,  
a priest in the church,  
a pastor to this congregation,  
I am also called to be the mother to two beautiful children  
and I find myself crying some nights.  
knowing that the hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice  
is not going to be satisfied or quenched in my lifetime.  
Still I work towards the promises made for me at baptism,  
confirmed by me at confirmation,  
and reaffirmed with everyone of you whenever we baptize an individual into the  
communion of saints.  
I do this because I recognize that it is not my responsibility to finish the work, but I  
cannot in good conscience walk away from it either. <sup>2</sup>

So in a little while I will stand with Bo behind the altar where bread will be presented,  
blessed, broken and shared.

The bread of life will be shared by rebels, organizers, advocates, and helpers and the  
kingdom of God will come closer into being, because while the hunger is greater than  
the bread on the table, and so is the God who provides it.

This is not the bread of our ancestors, this is our bread, this is our living bread.

I believe this  
I live it to the best of my ability  
And I pray you do as well.

Amen

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<sup>2</sup> Paraphrase of Rabbi Tarfon in the Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers 2:16) "It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it"