

This is all you get! That's what I imagine Jesus saying to the demanding masses that crowded around him. This is it! Right here. I am all you get! You don't get spectacular miracles. You don't get unbridled power. What you get is me. You get a person who is willing to speak the truth even when it's unpopular. You get someone who is willing to put his life on the line when others are marginalized, abused and used. You get the presence of God here on earth; a presence that recognizes your faults, loves you anyway, and offers you the option of a new heart and a right spirit. You get mercy.

That is what I imagine Jesus might have said because it seems from the text that the people following him are not satisfied with what they've been offered. They are struggling with a deep and overwhelming need that they can't quite identify. They desire something, but they're not sure what. Is it food? Are they hungry? Is it meaning or purpose? Is it power or the ability to heal others and themselves? They clearly want something, but they don't seem to know what that something is.

The reference here to the Israelites wandering in the desert, and receiving manna from heaven, is significant symbolically because the word "manna"

actually means “what is this?” As manna fell from the sky, the Israelites named it exactly like they saw it. God fed them with “what is this?” and their hunger was satiated. So, just like the Israelites of old, these folks following Jesus are wondering “What is this, and how does it relate to what I want?” How is this Bread of Life that Jesus is talking about supposed to feed my hunger?

We have an ongoing debate in our house about the best way to keep bread. Lianne insists it needs to be put in the freezer so it won't go bad. Lou and Maya insist it needs to be left out so it stays nice and soft. I stay out of it. We struggle with a difference of culinary opinion when it comes to avoiding bread going stale. Jesus is using the image of bread, a vital resource in most cultures, to explain theologically what his work and his life are all about. He is THE Sustainer. He is the energy source that keeps his followers going by satisfying their spiritual hunger. He is the bread that never goes stale.

And he nourishes and fortifies those who seek and embrace his presence as the conduit of unconditional love. Jesus says to these confused seekers, "I am the bread of life. I **am** the very thing that you are seeking. Whoever

comes to me will never hunger for meaning again. Whoever recognizes the compassion and justice that I embody will never thirst for purpose again. I am the living bread that has come down from heaven to rescue those who eat it.”

Such good news! But just like the followers in this text from the Gospel of John, we too often stumble to embrace this teaching. Just like them we too find ourselves asking “how **do** we welcome the nourishment that Jesus offers? What **does** it look like to “take and eat” and be satisfied?

I would like to suggest that the sacrament of Communion offers us a framework for answering these questions. This framework has at least four elements of practice that we are called by scripture to incorporate into our lives. A Biblical approach to communion involves Remembering, Confessing, Calling Upon the Divine Presence, and Making Commitments to follow that presence.

The sacrament of Communion involves **remembering** the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and offering thanks for his sacrifice. We will do this together as we read through the Communion liturgy this morning. And

when we do so, we will have an opportunity to hear, taste, touch and receive the grace of God revealed through Jesus the Christ. But the efficacy of that grace is directly related to how honest we are about needing it.

This is what confessing is really about - our admitting our need for grace. This coming weekend I'll be helping lead a retreat at Pilgrim Lodge for LGBTQIA+ families. In one of the lesson plans we'll be using about God's grace it suggests asking the campers to think about a mistake they have made, or a time they wish they would have done something differently. The leader is supposed to invite them to turn to the person next to them and say, "I made a mess. It was a mistake and I wish I would have done something different" to which that person is supposed to respond with, "God knows, and God loves you." I think, when I do this at camp, I'm going to ask folks to say "God knows, and God loves you, and so do I." Let's bring a little of camp into our worship this morning. Just turn to someone your sitting next to and say "I made a mess". And then the person who has heard your confession can say, "God knows, and God loves you, and so do I."

The Psalmist gives us a model for how to ask for God's mercy. We are to confess offenses, and ask that any tendency we might have to bend, twist or distort truth be wiped away, so that we can start anew.

Similarly, we cannot fully enter into communion without **calling** upon the presence of Christ, and asking for guidance. That presence of love and compassion, truth and generosity must permeate all that we do and say. And since we often are not capable of being the conduits of such gifts, we call upon the Spirit to move in and through us to make those qualities possible.

And finally we complete the sacrament by **Committing** ourselves - in the presence of God and one another - to being God's agents in a hurting world. We take the gift that we have received; the unconditional love that is God, and we let it loose on the world. We embody the Spirit ourselves.

Great miracles are not the point. Great abilities are not the point. The point is that the Living and Merciful Christ is what we get. A healing forgiving presence that is accessible to those who recognize their need, admit when they get things wrong, call upon the One who Sustains, and

commit to sharing that One with others. The Bread of Life is never spoiled or dry; never stale. On the contrary, the nourishing Spirit of Christ sustains us in all that we do, and when we come together at the Communion table, we do so celebrating not only the memory of a meal that is past, but an actual meal with the risen Christ as that one is seen in the faces of each and every person. Thanks be to God. Amen.