Some have food, some have none

July 23, 2006 (Proper 11, Year B)

Psalm 22:22-30 Ephesians 2:11-22 Mark 6:30-44

I had a simple breakfast this morning, of juice and bagel and coffee -- what the motels coyly call a "continental breakfast," but which is more accurately a "global breakfast" when you think about the distant places all the ingredients came from:

Coffee from Ethiopia and Indonesia, with milk mixed from cows in at least four New England states and sugar that might have come from Louisiana and Mauritius; orange juice from Florida and Brazil. A bagel with wheat that might be from Kansas or Canada, eggs from Mexico, oil from Hungary and Iowa. Cream cheese with California and Pennsylvania dairy ingredients, as well as things that come from a laboratory in New Jersey or China, such as xantham gum. (I googled xantham gum when I was writing this sermon, and found out that it's also used in the mining industry, as a lubricant for drill bits.) My breakfast has traveled more miles than my poor old 97 Toyota.

"This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat."

When the Gospel of Mark was being written, collected from the stories and memories that early Christians had treasured, everyone knew where their food came from. The fish was caught and dried and salted locally, the oil was from the olive trees that grew by your village, the wine was from a neighbor's vineyard; the mutton came from sheep you heard bleating in the hills at night. Everyone knew where their food came from. When they prayed with Jesus, *Give us this day our daily bread,* the chances are they knew the fields where the grain was grown, the miller who ground the grain and the baker who made the bread

If you were a wealthy Roman governor, to be sure you could get pomegranates from Persia and barley from Britain and sardines from Spain. But for the fishermen and sharecroppers and slaves and carpenters in 1st Century Palestine, the women and men who followed Jesus to this deserted place, knew where their food came from.

Give us this day our daily bread; their teacher, their savior, taught them to pray, *give us this day our daily bread.*

I mention this because food appearing mysteriously, miraculously in abundance has become part of our daily, secular, everyday existence. Today we hand over cash, or swipe a credit card, and take home plastic bags of foodstuff from all around the world. We are rarely surprised by the miracle of our food arriving in our shopping bags.

There is a spiritual discipline to this knowledge, to know our food, to savor a Massachusetts apple, a homegrown tomato or a homemade loaf of bread – *Give us this day our daily bread.* To know the real miracle of our food, the land where it was grown, the hands that tended and harvested it, is to realize both the beauty of God's creation and to recognize our utter dependence on God for every moment of our lives. It is the difference between abundance – the gracious overflowing of God's generosity – and excess, food that is hoarded and wasted, which is born out of greed or fear. Hang on to that distinction – abundance and excess – because it will come up again.

Give us this day our daily bread. It is a literal prayer, not simply a metaphor for spiritual nourishment, but a literal prayer for a simple meal, for basic sustenance. *Give us this day our daily bread.*

I've talked about Tent City before – it is a mobile, self-governed shelter of 100 women and men who are homeless. A few years ago, when Tent City was staying at the cathedral in Seattle, we invited everyone in the shelter and the parish for a weekly dinner. The first evening, when everyone had gathered in the

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parish hall, I invited them to join me in saying grace. I explained that I was going to say a prayer written by an Episcopalian woman from Boston, born in 1861: Vida Scudder. Everyone braced themselves for a windy, boring, pompous prayer, and so some jaws dropped when I recited: "Some have food, some have none, God bless the revolution."

Revolution, of course, being the same word as repent – they both mean *to turn around.* The revolution Vida Scudder prayed about wasn't the revolt of a political party, but the repentance, the revolution of the coming of the kingdom of God – the repentance, the coming of God's kingdom, which Jesus preached in Galilee, and demonstrated by this most perfect miracle – thousands of people gathered in a deserted place, finding there is food enough for everybody.

Give us this day our daily bread.

The world produces 20% more food than the entire world population can consume, yet more than 850 million people around the world experience hunger. Let me say that again: The world produces 20% more food than the entire world population can consume, yet more than 850 million people around the world experience hunger. We hoard food even as we ship it back and forth across continents; we sell trademarked seeds to India which grow plants can't reproduce, so that the seeds have to be bought anew each year from American companies…We undermine local markets in exchange for cash crops, and then we sell back rice and grains for profit.

Last week, as we heard how the disciples went out in pairs, teaching in the villages, we learned about sharing our gifts. Today's reading shows us *how* we share those gifts, to help bring about the coming of God's kingdom

There are 6 steps to this miracle:

1. Recognize the need

"*It is late, and these people have nothing to eat.*

2. Decide to help

"*You give them something to eat*

3. Evaluate what you have

"*We only have 5 loaves and two fish*

4. Get organized

Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass.

5. Give thanks

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves

6. Share

And all ate and were filled;

7. Clean up after

And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces

I happen to be one of those lucky people who, in spite of my education, in spite of my firm confidence in science, a believer in the complete reasonableness of evolution…still I find miracles very easy to accept. Some folks, though, are drawn to find more rational explanations for the miracles, focusing on the meaning behind the miracle, and their questioning can give us great insight into God's working. One such interpretation of the multiplication of loaves and fishes is the inspiration of participation. By sharing what they had, the disciples encouraged others to share:

Jesus tells them to feed the crowd, and the disciples say "That isn't in our parish budget; that would cost half a year's wages just to buy bread, and anyway we're on a parish retreat and it isn't our job to feed hungry people…" But Jesus has them bring forward the meager supplies that they do have ("But that was *our* dinner!") and he has the crowd sit together in small groups of 50 and 100. Five thousand is too many people to be anything but a mob, but when they sit down in smaller groups and look up and see the disciples ready to share everything they have, the crowd experienced the inspiration of participation.

Barnabas over there says "Well, I did bring some salted fish, for the road; it's here in my sack," and Rachel over here says "I stopped by that little market by the lakeshore a few miles back, in case I got hungry later. Here, have some of the bread and the figs I bought," and soon enough, everybody is inspired to share

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what they have.[1] In that moment of generosity, God's abundance became clear.

By becoming aware of the miracle of our daily bread, through steps as simple as making sure that some of our food each week comes from local farms, we begin that holy work of finding there is food enough for everybody. Taking on those first two steps –recognize the need in the world, evaluate what you have -- we learn about our own environment, and that knowledge helps us give thanks for the miracle of God's abundance; that knowledge opens our eyes to the hunger around us, and the abundance around us to meet that need. We step away from the excess of our supermarket culture, and towards the abundance of God's love.

Give us this day our daily bread, he taught us to pray, and we asked and we shared and we received.

[1] It is, I suppose, the first potluck in the Gospels.

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