

July 10, 2011

John 6:35, 41-51

### “A Daily-Bread God”

When I was six years old my parents bought their first, and only house- a brick, three-bedroom ranch with a one car garage. Before that we lived in a two-bedroom rental home, where I shared a bedroom with my nine year old brother. I expect my parents thought we were getting too old to share a room, and we needed a bigger place. With the help of my grandparents they came up with a down payment, and we became owners rather than renters.

I'm not sure how my brother felt about it, but I was devastated by the change. My bedroom seemed so LONELY and QUIET. There was no one to whisper with, to share jokes, riddles, questions about life, about people, what it all meant. Through the next months, however, I made a discovery. I often refer to this event- I think it may have been one of my earliest encounters with the divine. I learned how to open the screen on the window above my bed. I could quietly drop to the ground outside, and lie on my back to look at the sky. I no longer lay in the bed feeling lonely. I could slip outside every night, my heart pounding with the spirit of adventure, and spend quiet moments in the company of millions, billions, jillions of stars.

After I learned the Lord's Prayer, I added that to my contemplations under the sky. It was my way to make it clear to myself that I was communing with God.

Ours is a busy age. Time evaporates even as we use time-saving technologies and devices. The secular world demands our attention, pretending to offer us all we might ever want or need. But the truth is, it doesn't.

There is today a quiet resurgence of hunger for the holy. People long for encounters with the sacred, the mysterious, the spiritual- even the divine. People wander all over the map of spiritual pursuits seeking God, or something LIKE God. Crystals, pyramids, channelers might unlock the mysteries we yearn to understand. A Native American sweat-lodge experience might open the door for us to meet a holy presence. Within Christianity there has been interest in angels, in accounts of near-death experiences of heaven. There is even increased interest in Christian mystics

of the ages- those who encountered a holy presence in profound ways that changed their vision of human existence, of the world, the universe.

What about us? Well, we gather every Sunday morning to worship our God, bringing our hopes and hungers with us. For me, Sunday morning worship is essential. It STOPS me- stills my racing mind, body and spirit. I'm given the opportunity to focus eyes, thoughts, spirit, soul once again, on Jesus.

We meet Jesus this morning in the sixth chapter of John's gospel. The whole book of John is devoted to revealing who Jesus is, so people can believe in him. The sixth chapter presents the culmination of Jesus' activity in Galilee: the miracle of the loaves and fishes that fed a multitude; Jesus walking on water to his frightened disciples; and his explanation of these events the next day.

Jesus' words of explanation are known as the "Bread of Life discourse", because he identified himself as the one who brings life to the believer, just as loaves of bread sustain our physical lives every day.

Jesus cared about physical human need. He provided for physical hunger on more than one occasion. Christ never discounts physical needs as unimportant. In the Lord's Prayer that I prayed as a child beneath the stars, which we pray together every Sunday morning, we all ask for provision for our physical needs: "Give us this day, our daily bread."

But Jesus also knew what our age is rediscovering: that our spirits grow weary, tired, hungry, malnourished, starved- just as our bodies do. We need daily bread for our souls also. In his words to his followers, he teaches us that the presence of God is found in the life and person of Jesus. This bread for the spirit is available to us on a daily basis as well.

As a child I instinctively knew this. I found God right outside my bedroom window. I could slip out and meet God whenever I wanted. The God that was up there, in the magnificence of the glowing universe, was the same God I felt in my heart. I prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread," and I was given bread for my soul, in addition to the bread provided by my parents for my growing body.

How do we know when we have encountered this divine presence?

Daily-bread presence is life-giving. Jesus said he is the Bread of Life. He connected himself to something common, ordinary and accessible—but also completely necessary to life. We know we encounter the divine when we find ourselves strengthened, nurtured and sustained. When we feel “fed”, God is there.

Daily-bread presence is intimate. Our culture is pretty relaxed about eating. We are casual, informal, hands-on. Up visiting our home in Wisconsin we’ve been invited out to eat by various neighbors and friends. We often say, “Oh, but we didn’t bring anything but really casual clothes!” We are always told, “THIS IS WISCONSIN! You can wear anything you want!” And this does appear to be true! We like “come as you are” dining- places we can wear our grubbies. We like to eat our food with our fingers. (Our French family members are not so very comfortable with this!) But this is the kind of Daily-bread God we have. We’re offered finger-food for the soul. We can come close to Jesus- we can share a comforting and comfortable kind of intimacy with a daily-bread presence who knows us and loves us as we are.

Daily-bread presence is mysterious. The power that offers us eternal life and puts us in touch with God the Creator is beyond our finite comprehension. In the words of pastor and commentator Leonard Sweet, “There is a mountain-top as well as a table-top quality to the divine presence.” Yet in Jesus the mountain-top is brought to the table-top in a mysterious gift of grace— which we celebrate in Holy Communion- every first Sunday of the month at 9:00 worship, and every Sunday at 10:30 worship.

The Daily-Bread presence of God is not ONLY met in the bread of communion, but in the bread of the moments that make up our daily lives.

There’s a story that reminds me of the way our God is a Daily-Bread God, with us at a McDonald’s restaurant as well as kneeling at the altar in church.

One day a father went to visit his son’s preschool. It was a day when dads were encouraged to visit. But when he got there, he was shocked to discover that only a handful of fathers had come to be with their children.

Later that morning all the children were sitting in a circle on the floor. The teacher asked the children to tell the group something about their fathers, something that was special. One little boy said, “My Daddy is a lawyer. He

makes a lot of money and we live in a big house.” Another child said, “My father is very smart. He teaches at the college and knows lots of important people.” Finally it was time for this father’s son to say something special about his dad. The little boy looked up at his father, then he looked around the circle of his friends, and then he just smiled and proudly said, “My dad...my dad is HERE!”

Our God is a Daily-Bread God. Wherever we are, whatever we do, our God is always HERE!

It’s so easy for us to forget that, isn’t it? I invite you to join me this week. I am going to make sure I go outside after dark and just look at the sky, like I did when I was a little girl. I know there may be mosquitoes. I am trusting God to show me the way to STILL DO THIS! I promise to God and all of you that I will do this at least 4 times this week. I want to re-capture something that fed my soul, that is really simple, that I so easily forget to do—to just bring God my hungers so he might nourish and sustain me.

Will you do this, too? If you do, let me know how it went. We sometimes make our religion so complicated- and our God of mystery, intimacy and the bread of life, is right here with us all the time.