

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

August 2, 2020

Psalm 136:1–9; 23–26

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

136 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

2 Give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

4 to him who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

5 to him who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

7 to him who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

8 the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

9 the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

Psalm 136:23–26

23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

24 and rescued us from our foes,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

25 he who gives food to all flesh,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

26 Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 55:1–5

The Compassion of the Lord

1 “Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;

and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

3 Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

4 Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

5 Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,
and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

EPISTLE: Romans 9:1–5; 6-13

God's Sovereign Choice

9 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— **2** that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. **3** For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. **4** They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. **5** To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen

Romans 9:6–13

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, **7** and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” **8** This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. **9** For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” **10** And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, **11** though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— **12** she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” **13** As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

THE GOSPEL: Matthew 14:13–21

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” 16 But Jesus said, **“They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”** 17 They said to him, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.” 18 And he said, **“Bring them here to me.”** 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Sermon 30 – Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

“Eat”

Isaiah 55:1-5

Dear friends,

Our Old Testament lesson and Gospel lesson echo each other beautifully, and both deal with the concept of food, hunger, eating, that kinda thing. The question to ask is why this metaphor, why this image, and what we can learn from both its words and its use. We have many hungers on this world. Some are built in by God – a part of our nature – some come to us because of our sin. Most are a rather nauseating mixture of both, a natural desire given by God and twisted by our sin into an unholy direction. We are resoundingly successful at destroying and perverting, we sinners, and our success is only exceeded by God's amazing ability to fix, to justify, and to make holy. Thanks be to God for that.

This part of Isaiah is a mix and match of various messages. This particular part comes after the poetry about the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, so God has just described that the Christ will suffer, will die, will be lost in just the way we are so that we can be saved. After this, you have a series of promises of return, homecoming, welcome. Isaiah paints a picture of God's people who have strayed from God, been cut off by God, been angry with God just as God is angry with them. A broken relationship, a shattered harmony, a wrecked family. Isaiah promises that God is going to be the first to bridge this gap, that God is going to reach out to reconcile His people with Himself. He's going to seek out His people, He's going to find them, and He's going to bring them home. It's an amazing promise.

Then our chapter starts, and this is what Isaiah says. **“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”** Here's where the food imagery starts, and once it starts it does not stop. This is far from

the only time that God packages His message with these kinds of images, using the things we want as an illustration. God invites His people, He invites you, come and drink, come and eat, it doesn't cost anything. We all know this isn't about lunch or dinner, so what is He talking about?

Remember the Samaritan woman at the well, and look at our Gospel lesson, and you find the truth. Jesus feeds 5,000 to show that He is here to address a truer hunger, a truer need. We eat, we get hungry, we eat, we get hungry. It is a cycle that never ends until we die. Jesus shows them that bread comes from God, the appetite for bread comes from God, and more to the point that God satisfies that level of appetite and more. The body is not the point. I don't talk like this a lot, but it's worth saying here. The body is not the point, it never was. The body isn't *beside* the point either, it's not as if this is only about our soul, but Jesus and Isaiah both are reminding us that we are more than our hunger, we are more than this life, and we are more than these vessels of flesh that we reside in. We are Christian, which means we have faith, which means our souls need feeding as well as our bodies.

Jesus promises both, and both are important. Neither body or soul can be neglected, and while the body will die, it will also be resurrected. That is exactly what both Jesus and Isaiah are getting at. They are trying to pull people out of their fixation with the things of their world, and into a higher perspective and a better understanding of who they are. **"2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food."** Isaiah says to Israel, your purchase priorities are screwed up, your appetites are screwed up. The rest of the Bible calls this sin. What we want is not what is best for us, and often the last thing we really need. Even things that we really, really think we need may not be. Again, the challenge is perspective. What are you looking at your needs with? God's eyes, or yours?

How can you do anything else? That's the question that grips me lately. I'm me, I remain me, despite my best efforts and all the disgust with myself I can muster. If I'm me, I want what I want, I need what I think I need, and I can't seem to break out of that cycle. Passages like this suggest that there's some way to change that. If there is, I'll let you know, but if there is, it doesn't change the hunger. What do I mean by that? I can tell you from bloody experience that I've often thought that the problem is what I want. I've responded to that by asking God to change what I want, and God has never done so. Sometimes what I want seems to change on its own, by itself, but if that's God I can't see it as such. I spent years in my youth praying for God to shift my priorities, redirect what I want, and if He ever did He did it way too late to be any good to me.

The devil loves this, and He will quickly accuse you of being weak, and God of being a liar. We Christians know better, but the frustration still remains. Okay God, I get it. You want me to seek what's best for me, and what's best for me is what *You* want, not what I want. So help me do that! And He won't do it. He won't change the desire. He won't change the hunger. He won't change the heart.

But that's only what it seems like. The Scriptures tell us that when we believe in Jesus, God has already changed our hearts. That Jesus' blood makes us new people in God's sight. Our old sinful self is buried with Christ and a new holy Christian self, with new priorities and new hungers and new perspective,

arises in its place. The heart has changed, but the desire is still there. The hunger is still there. Our bodies still need food, our hearts still want what they want, and God is just sat there like a lemon. It's maddening to be torn in two different directions like that, it has been driving me all kinds of batty. But that's what being Christian is. Being torn in two. Wanting one thing, needing another, not sure of which is which, only knowing that somehow God manages to love us anyway because He's God.

Look at what Isaiah says next. **“3 Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. 4 Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.”** God is not telling us to change our appetite. God is not expecting the sin of your flesh, the sins that lurk in your heart, to go away. He is not expecting you not to sin. He is expecting to confess that sin, to own it, and then to turn toward what He offers instead. It's not about what you want, it's about what you do with what you want. Incline your ear, He says. That is the food that God would have us eat. That's the rich stuff, the good stuff, that's what is going to satisfy us in the end, because it will nourish our faith in God. It will reassure us of who God is and what He thinks of us. Our ear, when it hears God's Word, will tell us, yet again, for the umpteenth millionth time about Jesus because that is what our souls need. Why? That's where the David bit comes in. David was the king of God's people, he represented God's people, he stood for them. David the man is dead, and instead of David, we have us. God's steadfast, sure love is for you and all His people. God brings you out of the exile of sin to be like David, wrestling with sin, failing spectacularly, and being brought back by God. Jesus makes you His children whom He feeds with Himself, bread that does not spoil, rich food that does satisfy.

It just doesn't satisfy the flesh. We want peace. We want our lives back. We want our home back. We want our loved ones back. We want this. We want that. God's Word cannot give you any of that, but it gives you a God who doesn't ignore what happens here. He doesn't neglect your body. He'll make it suffer sometimes, because that's part of what He does. He'll deny you sometimes, depend on what you want and what you ask Him for. But Jesus doesn't deny you, who you are to your core. He doesn't deny you what you really need, which is His love and His forgiveness. And that, my dear Christian friends, is the final challenge. God's love seems like small potatoes, it seems like nothing at all against the hatred, death, and despair that rules this world. But it is the rich food of our souls. It is the reassurance that we are taken care of by God, that our needs are accounted for. You are not tools to God. You are not spokes in His machine. You are not chesspieces on His board. You are sons, you are part of His family, Jesus has made you that. He is the rich food you need. His love and forgiveness are that which fuels and drives the rest of you.

Amen.