

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost – July 29, 2018 – SUMMER of HEALING
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

John 6:1-21

FOR REFLECTION

“Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.”

~ Mother Teresa, Albanian Saint (1910-1997)

“When we sit at the table, there is more going on than satisfying hunger. It is sad to think of those who eat simply to satisfy their hunger and who do not permit themselves to linger under the many spells offered by a good meal - the satisfaction of our hearts, our minds and our spirits.”

~ Leo Buscaglia, American Author (1924-1998)

Healing Our Hungers

John has told us a story. It is a very old story. It comes from the Hebrew bible – a book called 2 Kings. The original story goes like this:

4:42 A man came from Baal-shali-shah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, ‘Give it to the people and let them eat.’ 43 But his servant said, ‘How can I set this before a hundred people?’ So he repeated, ‘Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, “They shall eat and have some left.”’ 44 He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

What John has done is called Midrash. He has give an old story new meaning. In the re-telling Jesus / Yeshuah is the prophet and wonder-worker Elisha. He has performed the same sign (only much bigger) to prove G-d sent him to liberate Israel from the Roman Empire. And the people, hungry for a liberator, see this sign – this feeding of thousands with a few loaves of barley bread – and intend to make him their messianic king.

What John has also done with his Midrash is to connect in people’s minds the festival of Passover and Jesus breaking bread.

6:4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.

Passover – and now the feeding of thousands by Jesus – are about the Exodus from enslavement in Egypt (liberation), unleavened bread and manna (G-d’s provision in the midst of nothingness). Like Moses, like Elisha:

6:11 ...Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated...

The Greek word for “given thanks” is the same word associated with the term Eucharist. This event is an extension of The Lord’s Supper. (John works both forward and backward in our minds.)

That’s why this story is not about the miracle of people on a picnic sharing what they have with each other. That’s why this story is not about an attitude of abundance in a time of scarcity. Both of those things are excellent values to hold – but this story is not about that. This story is about making connections in our minds so that we understand who Jesus was and is. And it is about much more than how Jesus feeds our hunger for bread.

The people here are hungry for liberation from military and economic oppression. They are hungry for a political/military leader sent from G-d to take their country back. They want a Moses, an Elisha, an Obama to follow. But what does Jesus do?

6:15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

In John’s story, Jesus has fed and empowered the people – just like Moses – to liberate themselves – to walk into the Promised Land without him. He has given them a ritual to remind themselves that the Messiah is within each of them and all of them together.

It is not up to one person or one prophet or one king or one president to satiate the hungers of the world. One person can give us hope. One person can show us a way to proceed. One person can remind us of our purpose and our responsibility for one another. But it is up to us – individually and together – to heal the hungers of our hearts, our communities, our nations.

Can you come up with an example of a personal or larger hunger that you have healed – fully or partially? Or a hunger you would like to heal?

- My hunger to be a parent – tried medical procedures, then adopted. Long journey but worth it.
- My hunger to experience an alternative community based on creativity and radical values (economic, environmental, communal...) – an approximation of the Kin-dom of G-d, if you will. This church – you – facilitated the experience of Burning Man – which proved that the creation of a similar alternative here is possible. It fits with one of our Core Values: “Build the Future with Innovation and Creativity”
- Xxxxx
- Xxxxx
- Xxxxx

- Xxxxx
- Xxxxx
- Indian actor Amitabh Bachchan said this about creative hunger:

“I like to feel the butterflies in the stomach, I like to go home and have a restless night and wonder how I'm going to be able to accomplish this feat, get jittery. That hunger and those butterflies in the stomach are very essential for all creative people.”
 ~ Amitabh Bachchan, Indian Actor (b.1942)

In Jesus, our hungers are met with the possibility of healing. We are empowered to heal the hungers of our selves, each other, our world. Communion reminds us of this. Being in this room reminds us of this. Looking at one another and hearing each other's stories – we are reminded of this. Thank you Obama – I mean Jesus!

Scripture Reading for Sunday July 29, 2018 – Eleventh after Pentecost – Year B

John 6:1-21 (NRSV)

1 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2 A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3 Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.

4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 10 Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all.

11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." 15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

“We're in a world where there's famine and hunger and people are dodging bullets and having their nails pulled out in dungeons so it's very hard for me to place any high value on the work that I do to write a song. Yeah, I work hard but compared to what?”
 ~ Leonard Cohen, Canadian Musician (1934-2016)