

Bread

First Sunday of Lent

March 5, 2017

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Text: Genesis 2-3; Matthew 4

The devil, the tempter, says to Jesus: ‘Son of God, command these stones to become bread’; Jesus says to the devil, the tempter – “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Hm - I know that what Jesus says is profound, but, I wonder how it sounds to someone who is hungry – who is really, dangerously, hungry – without enough food or any at all; how does speaking of the sustenance of God’s word sound to someone who is truly hungry? Now granted, Jesus IS hungry – Jesus has fasted for 40 days and nights in the wilderness – so Jesus IS hungry, famished – but it’s different to choose to be hungry, to fast; different than for someone who is truly hungry. I personally don’t know what it’s like to be hungry – I know what’s it like to feel hungry, even to say I am STARVING sometimes to be dramatic – but I have never had a day in my life when I was unsure if there would be food for me. I have always had enough – more than enough. How about you? – do you know what it’s like to be hungry? – not to FEEL hungry, but hunger of the sort that you don’t have enough now and aren’t sure if you will have enough in the future. Not many of us have or ever will be hungry in that way – not Jesus either, famished as he was. But there are lots of hungry people in this world – then and now – so many, too many, truly hungry people. So how does it sound to a hungry person for Jesus to say and for us to reflect on this: “one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’? Might one who is hungry perhaps say, ‘well OK, but I need some bread!’?

I love this story – the story of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness – found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It IS a profound story to reflect on, which has helped the church over time to know better who Jesus is and who we are to be as followers of Jesus. But what got me thinking about how this all might sound to a person who is hungry is the theme for this Lent, which was developed by a collaboration of Hope Church folks - “ELEMENTS” is the

theme, described in this way: “the spirituality of these Lenten texts is discovered in the everyday elements of creation. These stories don’t take us away from the tumult of life but reveal God in the midst of the stories that are unfolding around us and the elements that ground us.” That’s good – physical elements that direct our spirituality into the tumult of life and God’s presence there. So how might we hear “Bread” and this temptation of Jesus about bread, speaking to the tumult of a world where there are hungry people? – how could it ground us in that way?

Well, to do that, how about if we talk about another temptation story first? – in Genesis 3. I love this story too – peculiar and profound as it is; and it’s only had centuries of commentaries, mountains of material written about it as a touchstone of theology. So rather than trying to somehow unpack all of this story and the meaning that has been made of it, I want to give a perhaps unusual take on what is happening in this story by talking about a C.S. Lewis book. Lewis wrote a science fiction trilogy with a theological spin to it. The 2nd book in the trilogy is *Perelandra* - about a planet that is basically an unspoiled Eden, complete with an Eve and Adam – and this planet is visited by a man from Earth. You’ll have to read it for the plotline, but I want to tell you about an incident when this man arrives on the planet: He is hungry (famished!) and thirsty – and finds a piece of fruit. He bites into this fruit - and describes the taste to be of such pleasure that for one taste of this fruit wars would be fought and nations betrayed! He consumes it – and he reaches for another – but as he does so, he realizes he is no longer hungry, or thirsty – yet he wants another – such pleasure! And back on Earth he is sure he would have had another, and that wars probably would be fought for this fruit; but here, on *Perelandra*, in Eden, it occurs to him, this is enough – this surprises him, but it is a good surprise – and he chooses to have no more, just the abundance of enough.

The story of Adam and Eve in God’s creation is a story of abundance – everything they need – no hunger or want. And part of that abundance is limits – a limit of something that perhaps they want but do not need. Do you think that part of abundance can be limits? – that

a limit is not a diminishment but essential to abundance? – if you're not sure, then you're probably human – you wonder about and test limits; you wonder if abundance simply means more. I am going to go out on a limb here and agree with God – that limits are essential to abundance; God creates a world in which abundance has inherent within it limits – and the limits are not diminishment, they are good. And if it seems like that's just me taking sides with the boss, let me also make clear that I have trouble understanding and accepting the limits of my humanity – of this world – of creation. But let me also say that to live into this truth of limits woven into abundance, can open our eyes (to turn a phrase) to how we are grounded in God's world and how we are called to be faithful in the tumult of this world.

You see, when Jesus is tempted to turn stones into bread, it seems to me it is a temptation that has to do with his humanity. The tempter addresses Jesus as the 'Son of God' – yes, true – and human too (the tempter is very good at omitting important details – both here and in Eden); and as a human, Jesus had limits – we humans are not able to sate our hunger by turning stones into bread. What we do have as humans is God's creation and God's word – not 'one lives only by God's word'; but 'one lives by bread AND word', together - and that is enough.

Here's what I've been thinking about this week – that the word of God Jesus speaks of has plenty to say about being hungry and about hunger. Hunger is good – it invites us to partake of bread, of sustenance, of the amazing abundance of God's creation - it is remarkable to eat, to enjoy. For there to be hungry people is not good – no bread to eat – it is to be cut off from the gifts of God's creation, unable to enjoy and to flourish. The beautiful truth of God's word is that there is enough in God's creation; the convicting truth of God's word is that it is because we do not live in the good limits God has given that there are hungry people in this world.

We have come to believe the tempter in Genesis that abundance is only about more; we have come to believe the tempter in Matthew that there is not enough within God's world. As individuals focused on wanting more; as communities seeking advantage; as a church seeking

its own triumph; as a nation addicted to more – more power, more security, more privilege, more success - - in all those ways we have reached beyond the abundance God has given; and in doing so have found what is deadly: we have found possession and power that is kept only through conflict; found suffering and diminishment that is inflicted on too many; found emptiness and despair that does not see the gifts within us. We have not trusted God's truth that there is enough in God's abundant creation – not trusted the truth that simply enough is good.

2 temptation stories – what happens when we hear these 2 temptation stories together? One thing that can happen is this - that we live into the wisdom of this proverb: 'enough is as good as a feast'. Together with me, reflect on that in this Lenten season – 'enough is as good as a feast'. Listen for God's abundance in the limits that may speak to us – that enough is very good.

Because as we do that, it will turn us again to what this all my sound like to those who are truly hungry - to those near and far who suffer from limits crossed, who suffer what is deadly in the midst of God's creation. By God's grace what it will sound like is God's people living out God's word – God's creative gifts of justice and mercy, compassion and conviction at work through us toward a world of enough for all. We have the gifts of God's creation and God's presence; the sustenance from the ground and the Spirit; of baked bread and spiritual bread – they are never meant to be separated, and together they nourish us to trust God's abundance of enough – to live into the calling of community in God's world that has enough for all. Thanks be to God. AMEN.