



Your Gifts are Very Much Welcome and Needed Here

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost || August 4, 2024 || 9:30 am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, Massachusetts ||
Proper 13B || Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78:23-29; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb
Slemmer, Esq.

Good morning! If you are here for the first time, please know that we share this in common – this is my first Sunday as St. Andrew's Rector and I am simply delighted to be here. If you are a long-time parishioner, or have been here for some months or years, I want to say Thank you – thank you for your patience, for your perseverance and resiliency and for your faithful search for your next church leader. I am so grateful that we've found each other!

This Sunday we are treated to readings full of familiar and revolutionary sentiments – we have Paul's letter to the Ephesians, laying out the rules and expectations for we Christian-folk – a great refresher for the people of antiquity and a reminder for our modern and inundated ears. We also have the second of five Gospel passages from John focused on Bread as the conduit for understanding various important aspects about Jesus and the Kingdom of heaven. Last week, as we heard during Pattie's graduation sermon, we were treated to the double story of the feeding of the 5,000 AND Jesus walking on water. The bread lesson offered was that Jesus could do many things including provide adequate sustenance for everyone. Feeding of the 5,000 is a miracle story that appears in every one of our gospels and was astounding then and now.

This morning we have some of the after story – what happened **after** this gigantic celebration party. After the clean up and after the hosts – Jesus and the apostles had sailed away, perhaps seeking rest and some quiet time and the opportunity to reflect on the incredible experience in which they had just participated, perhaps swapping stories that they had heard among the 5,000 people, or to hear more from their friend Jesus.

As we just heard, some of the party participants have found Jesus in Capernaum, And I imagine Jesus being slightly curt in his tone. (Any time we have Jesus using the preface, "Very Truly I tell you" I think of a friend or parent chiding their listener –with "Oh Come on!", or "listen up!" or even an exasperated, "I'm telling you again, for the last time" - which thank

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goodness, he isn't - but in this morning's passage, Jesus uses this phrasing TWICE- he *is* imploring these folks to listen – to the important truth that the bread Jesus is offering will satisfy their need for food and water and will provide eternal life. THAT is quite a set of promises and the re-gathered crowd doesn't seem to get it – (we can't really blame them, this is an earth-shattering set of promises that **we** work to wrap our heads around each week when we gather in this sanctuary with our questions, experiences, heart breaks and joys) so they ask a really human question -- “well, what do we have to do to earn this bread and these promises?” and Jesus – again exasperated perhaps. You don't earn this bread, it is available to all who believe in God. The people seem to take this in and mention that their relatives in the desert getting this bread from Moses – and again Jesus lays on the second “VERY TRULY I TELL YOU” or AHEM – the bread is not from a human, but from God.

So, bread lesson #1 – this bread is for everyone and there is plenty to go around. Today's bread lesson – lesson #2 – you don't earn this bread, this bread is from God. We'll continue the lessons using bread as the teaching aid that Jesus turns to to invite people to know him – to know God and God's lifesaving promises as we continue this summer.

What a marvelous beginning to our on-going conversation. I am curious to know how your faith informs your daily lives? I'm excited to get to know the ways in which you struggle with some of the hard lessons in scripture – where you wrestle and what you take for granted. Today, we need not look far for a clear set of expectations for each of us. We listened to Joanie read a portion of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which was pretty clear. We are each afforded gifts from God – we are each called upon to exercise these gifts, and each of us is required to act in love, peace and with kindness.

One of my delights and gifts this week is to begin to learn the many ways in which St. Andrew's welcomes the expression of each of your gifts. The lovely volunteers who attend to the altar preparation each week, the folks who tend to our garden, pick vegetables and donate them to the Hanover Food Pantry, prepare the hospitality for after our worship, the leaders who are called to make Rosie's Place and our Day at the Beach a success, the Christmas Fair coordinators and the champions who make the Cookie festivities happen, and the members of the choir, who even during their summers off, check and practice our hymns using our inclusive bulletin. Each makes our shared worship experience rich and an important and valuable investment of our time.

I am excited to learn what animates your spiritual lives, what stories and experiences you bring with you to this sanctuary each week, and I thank you in advance for the patience and

grace that you will offer as I find my way in this pulpit, in this church and in the surrounding Hanover community.

If you are unsure what your spiritual and temporal gifts are, or what God has given you to do – I welcome some shared time of discernment. Perhaps we can untangle or unwrap some of those gifts together.

It is among God's most surprising gifts in my life to place me here, now, and I am convinced that my response and your call are faithful grace-filled invitations to what God has asked of us and the work that God has given the St. Andrew's community to do.

Thank you for waiting for me. Thank you for making this call and thank you for generously allowing us to change up our communion bread for the next few weeks of our bread as teaching lessons.

My weekly invitation to each of you is to practice what we learn together here. Today – we are told to live a life worthy of the calling God has given us. That can be a tall order, and I know, with certainty that one of the gifts of this community is to have a place here for everyone – regardless of your calling, beliefs or background experiences. We are all required; each a necessary part of the whole, needed to accomplish what God expects and invites of us.

Each week, let us do our best to live as we are asked to live, as loving, peace-filled Christians who tell the truth, who make God's love visible and kindness loud! And when we fall short, may we return to this same space next Sunday and the Sunday after that, to sit, reflect, evaluate and adjust. To learn and adapt so that we are evolving together, as the community God needs us to be, as the people Jesus equipped us to be; To be found, fed, nourished and loved by one another and by God.

Amen+