

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

23 E. Airy Street | Norristown PA 19401 | (610) 272-4092



WHAT IT IS (BREAD OF HEAVEN)

Rvd.. Andrew F. Kline

Text of the Sermon preacherd the 10th Sunday after Pentecost

August 1, 2021

EXODUS 16:2-4,9-15 | PSALM 78:23-29

EPHESIANS 4:1-16 | JOHN 6:24-35

I'm sure that those who heard that the ancient Greeks had gathered together in a town named Marathon to run a long long race, thought they were crazy. They noted it was not just military men in training, but philosophers, shepherds, tradesmen, indeed, any citizen who wanted to do it, were invited to compete. And none of those who started or finished the race would ever have imagined what would become of the Olympic ideal.

I make it a goal, each Olympics, to tune into a sport I know nothing about, and wonder why people would dedicated their lives to it. I marvel at the gifts they posses, and wonder if they will win at the game of life.

We learned this week that even one of the most highly decorated and dominant athletes of modern times, who has dominated her sport for a decade, still worries that we won't love her unless she wins a gold medal. But we also learned that Simone Biles is a wise and wonderful woman, who realizes it is better to know one's limits and to fight for her team just as much for herself. Looking with a wider perspective, she put a sport, that had also abused and used her and many other young girls, in its place. We watched her from a different point of view, as she cared for her body, her mind, her soul, and told us they were far more important.

This was not supposed to be an Olympic year. We are watching a strange spectacle of athletes competing in empty stadiums, virtually before the world, but in every other respect, competing for themselves. And as our lives continue to be shaped by the unexpected, especially a pandemic that won't go away, we are invited by God's Word to put life into perspective. We are invited to search for real food, real drink, to work for a prize that does not fade, for joys that will last.

Jesus has just fed the five thousand, and crossed over the other side of the lake in a manner that reminded his disciples of Israel's victorious crossing of the Red Sea. The crowds of have come to find him. It is time to reflect on what he has done. There is a lot going on here. And as John tells the story, neither the disciples or the crowds really understand, but it is the crowds who have the hardest time. They see it as a spectacle, a magic trick, an athletic feat that Jesus has pulled off. Once they find Jesus, they really don't know where to begin, what question to ask him.

“When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.’ How can you blame them, they were not just fed, but were delighted. They were entertained, amazed and satisfied.

So Jesus jumps straight to the point: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” Jesus warns them, don’t just look at the talent, the skill, the result. Rather, look to the source, the true motivation that will make you to share in the blessing, to be a blessing for others. Work for food that does not perish, that can truly be shared all around.

That is the problem with this game of life, isn’t it? We lose track of why we are in it. We sometimes even neglect the real gifts and talents that God has given us to focus on less important ones. We focus on making money. We neglect our health, our character. We work for ourselves, not for our family or our community.

If we listen to the questions we ask ourselves and others we can tell if we are off course. The crowds ask Jesus: “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Why is that their question? Every athlete knows there are no shortcuts. So does every saint. Without believe, without faith in the value of the training, the value of the competition, the value of perfecting the gifts God has given you, well there is no point.

So Jesus points them to hidden crux of the matter: faith. “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” If you believe, then you begin to see that the important point is that every blessing comes from God, even when it doesn’t look at first like a blessing.

Jesus gives them the example of the manna that fell in the wilderness, which fed the Israelites in their wilderness wandering. There is bread from heaven, and there is true bread from heaven. Manna means in Hebrew, literally, ‘what is it’. Manna is a question. It is God’s provision for the moment. And now we don’t need Moses’ manna, we need the Father’s manna, the true bread from heaven.

The point is, of course God provides! In life we see that provision in the tough times, in the times when we can’t compete, when our strength and abilities fail us, when we are tested. There is a phrase we have heard a lot over the past year: “It is what it is.” There is not much to do about it. What is happening is what is happening.

But consider. The phrase can be spoken with or without faith. We can say, 'It is what it is,' either with faith or fatalism. That is why Jesus asks us to meditate on the manna at this moment. Manna means 'what is it?' If we believe in God, there is always a way out of no way. In God's presence, it is what it is. There is only just enough for today. But there will be more tomorrow. The bread of angels will get us through the wilderness.

Father, give us this day our daily bread.

When we have reached that point of absolute honesty with ourselves, we are ready to put things into perspective, to ask better questions. Jesus said to them: "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

We live by faith, not by sight. We live by every word that comes from the Father's heart, the bread of angels, the water of life. This is the point of the game, the reason for the contest, the goal of life, the pleasure that never fades.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." As the song says: We will run and not be weary. We will walk and never faint.

What else is the point: We will find and fulfill our purpose as we are a blessing for others.