

Sermon: Pentecost 10B August 4, 2024

Peace, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher

Texts: Ex. 16:2-4, 9-15, Eph. 4:1-16, John 6:24-35

Today's first reading from Exodus is full of complaining, complaining born of forgetfulness and fear. We find the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, perhaps six months out of Egypt. Their food supply has run out, and they take out their fear and frustration on their bold but unseasoned leaders. It wasn't long before today's events that they were being led out of Egypt, walking with dry feet through the Red Sea, leaving behind years of slavery and Pharaoh's army. Just a chapter before in Exodus, the Israelites were singing and dancing and praising God for their miraculous deliverance. But in **today's** text, just a little while after deliverance day, we find not a word about their rescue or about the God who made it happen and who pledged to go with them all the way to freedom and a new life and land. The Israelites, like so many of **us**, had a very short memory; hunger and panic made them fear they were headed for the worst possible scenario. They forgot God's promises...so they didn't even **bother** to complain about **God**; instead, they picked on Moses and Aaron. Overnight they rewrote the story of their oppression into a story of "not such a bad life" in Egypt, and wondered aloud why they'd ever let themselves be talked into leaving.

Now before you and I start pointing fingers and talking trash about those Israelites, let's be clear. It's a tribute to the Jewish people and to the rabbis who selected what went into the Hebrew Bible – the one **Jesus** used – that they kept this story in...and didn't try to pretty it up. It was an act of honesty and faith to tell it like it was and so help generations of God's people see themselves – **ourselves, too!** – in the story. Including that story makes it clear that spiritual amnesia afflicts us **all**. It **also** provides even **more** evidence that God is a God of grace and compassion, a God who keeps promises even when we **don't**, and who rains down manna instead of fire from heaven in the face of our faithless complaining.

And then there's the story John tells in the gospel. The crowd that came looking for Jesus in that story were not **complaining**, but they were **confused**...maybe even a little thick-headed. And which of **us** has not been there? They were all caught up in loaves and manna, the miracle for their ancestors in

the desert and the miracle of feeding thousands that Jesus had recently performed, **so** much so that they were in danger of missing the **True** Manna standing before them: Jesus, the Bread of Life, the food that satisfies every need and every hunger and that has no expiration date, not even **death**. Last week we began a series of Gospel readings that focus on the bread of life. Now here we are, in the **second** week of that series. In working through this “bread” chapter, we are doing what is helpful for faith and understanding...not so much working out in our **heads** the **concept** of Jesus as the bread of life, but rather spending time with Jesus our bread, experiencing and encountering the Word made flesh, which will help us embrace him and all that he comes to give us. It takes **time** for our relationship with Jesus to develop and grow. Indeed, it takes a **lifetime**! But when we come with a spirit of humility and modesty about what we know and what we **don't** know about how and why God chooses to feed us...when we sit down at Jesus' feet patiently, not in a rush, saying, we're willing to be taught about who you are and what sort of life you bring, we will find ourselves **more** than satisfied. We'll discover that we have all that we need to sustain this body and life, now and forever...as Luther's Catechism puts it. And so it is **today**: Jesus is here, truly present, ready to feed us anew with the manna of mercy and the bread of life.

Whenever these readings come round again, I remember a Sunday nearly ten years ago, when I baptized a little boy named Nico in Oakland and preached on these same texts. Niko was then two years old, so just **beginning** a lifetime of relationship with Jesus. But **already** he'd shown signs of **wanting** that relationship and discovering what it can offer. Dancing down the aisle to and from communion, reaching out for the bread at the communion table, drawn like a magnet to the stack of individual communion glasses – these were all signs of God drawing Nico to God's self and of Niko being drawn to follow, being **called** to follow.

In today's **second** reading, from Ephesians, we find powerful, beautiful words about growing up in faith, about growing up to lead “a life worthy of [our] calling.” All of us have the **same** calling, whether we are children or adults: we are **all** called to a life of love...love for God and love for our neighbors...and through baptism or any other way God chooses, we are given what we need to **live** this way. The writer of Ephesians talks about this in terms of us being equipped for the work of ministry...which is the work **each and all** of us do, not just pastors or seminary professors or the “big names” in the Bible.

But, in **this** text, being equipped **isn't** about accumulating skills or knowledge. No, **here** the word we translate as "equip" comes from a Greek word that means "the setting of a bone." **That** suggests that sin is the condition of being **out of alignment** with Christ and that baptism is God's act of realigning us with Christ, with his death and resurrection. In baptism, for anyone, a child or an adult, God resets the bones of our lives so that, going forward, **our** life will look more and more like **Christ's** life, a life of love, a life lived for others, a life that is free and forever.

On that day nine years ago, when I baptized little Niko, I was struck by the meaning of the name he bore: Niko Shubi Francesco which means, "I'm here for the victory of the people. I'm hopeful, and I'm free." From that day Niko has borne on his forehead and chest the **symbol** of victory, hope, and freedom: the cross of Christ, the sign under which he grows daily into Niko, man of God, a man for the people, and a man rejoicing in the hope and freedom that are his true inheritance. Niko doesn't know you; he may never meet you. But I believe he would be happy to share with you his name...so that you might remember daily the inheritance you share with him and all God's people: the victory of love and hope and freedom **and** the bread that will **continue** to fill you and fit you for life as God's beloved, sharing the Bread of Life with the world and dedicated to join Jesus in making the world near and far a place where **no** one need go hungry for bread, for love, for hope or for peace.

Soon **we** will gather at the table to receive Holy Manna, the bread Jesus promised, the bread Jesus **is**: the True Bread come down from heaven to strengthen our faith, to nourish us with life, to draw us ever closer to him, to increase our love for **all** people – yes, even our enemies --, to make us one, and to confirm in us the hope of life forever with God, a life we've **already** begun. So thanks be to God for giving us the True Bread from heaven! Thanks be to God for the gifts of baptism and communion that enable Christ to live in our hearts by faith! And thanks be to God for drawing us together and sending **us** out to share this Bread with the world! Amen.