

Sermon proper 13 B 8/2/15 Aurora

A widower had some raspberry bushes. The first summer after his wife died, a woman from his church asked if she could come over and pick raspberries. She knew he and his wife had grown the bushes from the spindly young canes that came from the mail-order catalogue into thick healthy shrubs laden with fruit.

“They have to be picked if you want them to keep producing,” she explained. “And I want to make you a pie. You don’t get raspberry often because it takes a whole lot of berries and you have a whole bunch of berries just waiting to be made into pie.”

She picked the berries in the morning and returned in the afternoon with the pie: homemade crust, red raspberries and filling peeking through the golden brown lattice crisscrossing the top, and still warm.

“Enjoy a piece with me?” he asked. “I can’t eat an entire pie by myself.” He poured them each a glass of 2% milk and cut two pieces of the pie. It was marvelous – sweet, tart, gooey delicious fruit; flaky, tender, slightly salty crust. Perfect, especially with the milk to wash it down and clear the palate for the next bite. He thanked her for the pie.

Although the pie would have been a luxurious treat – he could certainly have enjoyed it piece by piece by himself – he got an idea.

He packed up the pie and went to visit a friend. “Here, have a piece of pie,” he said. He sliced a piece and dished it onto one of the paper plates he had brought along. “I won’t stay long, but I think you will enjoy this.” They visited while the friend ate the pie, a small piece, enough to taste, but the richness of the sweet and tart and tender pie made a small piece just the right amount.

He thought next of who might actually not just enjoy a piece of the pie, but need the pie; who might need some simple pleasure, some tangible reminder that unassuming things like berries and sugar, flour and salt can be transformed into something that lets you actually taste summer in a mouthful; who might be served by this undemanding manifestation of care and love in edible form.

The pie was too good not to share. He spent the rest of the day sharing the pie, slice by modest slice. He and those with whom he shared it found that even a small piece could convey the essence of it: sunshine, earth, abundance, creativity, compassion.

He came to think of it as communion by pie.

It was a kind of grace that conveyed the knowledge that he was part of a larger community and that connection was part of what he hungered for. The pie did not cause the connection, of course. But the pie was the means for it, a way to say: “I see you. I want you to join me in enjoyment, in nourishment, in a moment set aside. Take off your

work gloves, turn off your computer, set down your cell phone, check book, dish towel. Sit down for a moment and do nothing more than enjoy a piece of pie.”

There are two kinds of hunger. There is physical hunger which physical food can satisfy; but there is a spiritual hunger which that food can never satisfy.

Most of us look forward to a big feast on a holiday like Thanksgiving or Christmas. We all have our favorite item that we want on the menu. Turkey with the trimmings, a Roast of beef with Yorkshire Pudding, or Ham and sweet potatoes. What might your family favorites be are conditioned by your ancestry, culture, childhood experiences, and how readily provisions are available and how deep is your pocketbook.

But don't we also hunger for the reunion with our family and friends that takes place at such holidays. The conversations, the jokes, catching up on the news, debating issues in order to connect more deeply with one another and strengthen the bonds that tie us together. The food and our hunger bring us together and we are physically fed of course, but also emotionally and psychologically.

But there is more to feeding our bodies and minds. Jesus is telling us that there are other hungers which can be satisfied only by him. There is the hunger for truth, for love, for fullness and purpose to life. He is the “Bread of Life” because he satisfies the hunger of the human heart and soul. If we substitute the words “Bringer of Life” for Bread of Life we can come to understand that our relationship with Jesus nourishes and sustains life itself to the fullest measure.

But let us not forget. Hunger has a way of always returning. It's like that conventional wisdom opinion that when you've eaten Oriental Food you will be hungry again in a couple of hours. The foods we consume are converted into the fuel our bodies need to function. Our appetite for pleasure, happiness, freedom is never satisfied for very long. We are ever on a quest to satisfy these wants and needs. Just like we have to go back and eat again and again. We have to regularly pay attention to our wants and needs. I think it is so with our spiritual hunger as well.

We return each week to pray together, for praying alone seems never enough. We return for communion to strengthen our relationship with Christ and receive the power, that Amazing Grace, again and again. Once we have tasted the goodness of the Lord, we seek it more and more.

Indeed. Is this not what Jesus is really saying, “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

So it is that we come, not once, nor seldom, but again and again. Amen.