**Sermon Bread of Life Aug 2021**

**Didn’t we just have two sermons on the bread of life! Yes, we did. Now guess what, there is one more Gospel reading from John on the bread of life theme after today’s Gospel reading. That will make four consecutive weeks the bread of life theme will follow one another. Wouldn’t you all agree the people who worked so hard on The Lectionary are giving us the message the bread of life is important? In fact, the bread of life is the very core of our Episcopal belief.**

**Each of these four Gospel readings goes a little deeper into the center of our belief system. In today’s reading Jesus added these thoughts to his message concerning the bread of life. He tells all of us, “I am the living bread that comes down from heaven.” He is saying to us when we partake of a wafer or a piece of bread, during a Eucharistic Rite, in the simple wafer or small piece of bread, we are partaking of the presence of our living Lord.**

**The bread in our sacrament is no ordinary bread because Jesus told us, he is the living bread. I can’t even try to explain the presence of Christ in our sacrament of bread and wine. There are many theories and names given this sacrament. I prefer to leave the communion experience as a mystery, rather than give the experience names, labels and explanations. Communion is a mystical experience, felt in our hearts, needing no explanation.**

**Over these weeks of Jesus explaining the Eucharist to people then and to us now, I began to realize how many times we explore the mystery of bread and wine during a Communion service. We begin our Holy Eucharists by a priest saying,” Lift up your hearts.” We answer back, “We left them up unto the Lord.” It’s easy to fall into a pattern of not really hearing what is asked of us, and simply answering, “We left them up unto the Lord.” It seems to me, lifting our hearts to the Lord, means giving ourselves over to Jesus, and attempting to do his will as best we can everyday of our lives. Notice we’re not asked to lift our brain up, but to lift our hearts.**

**For me the heart is the central part of us allowing goodness and grace to flow from us. I know we all need** **a brain but where would we be without a heart? Think of the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz.* These are some of the lyrics he sings longingly for a heart. “Just because I'm presumin' that I could be kind-a-human. If I only had a heart. I'd be tender - I'd be gentle and awful sentimental. If I only had a heart.” Toward the end of the song the Tin Man sings these words. “I hear a beat. How sweet. Just to register emotion,**   **devotion**, **And really feel the part.** **I could stay young and chipper and I'd lock it with a zipper, If I only had a heart. Just to register emotion,**  **jealousy devotion, And really feel the part. I could stay young and chipper and I'd lock it with a zipper, If I only had a heart.”**

***The Wizard Oz* is a classic film because, like so many classic movies, this film has universal themes. We can all relate to and understand the universal themes in this movie. We can understand why the Tin Man longs for a heart. The heart is the center of our emotions. Listen to thr differences to the Scare Crow’s song. “And my head I'd be scratchin' while my thoughts were busy hatchin' If I only had a brain….** **I could tell you why the ocean's near the shore. I could think of things I never thunk before. And then I'd sit, and think some more.” I’m pleased we are to lift up our hearts and not our brains. Thinking is a wonderful gift. Acting on our thoughts alone, through the deeds we do for others, would be difficult without the emotions of our hearts.**

 **Perhaps when each of us hears the words one more time, “lift up your hearts,” we can stop for a minute and realize what it means in our everyday lives to lift up our our hearts to the Lord. As we lift up our hearts, we become more open, more willing to give to others. Here is a fact about how often heart is mentioned in the King James version. The brain is not mentioned once, whereas the heart is cited 826 times. There is a catch to opening our hearts to give to others. We become more vulnerable and of course more open to hurt. On the other hand, if we harden our hearts, we place a shell around that most vulnerable emotional part of our bodies, our heart. The next time you hear the phrase, “lift your hearts,” experience, imagine your heart lifting toward Jesus. Jesus gave up two new commandments and you all know them. Loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves requires actively participating and serving others around us. Quietly praying by ourselves is a wonderful practice. Yet helping others often requires turning prayer into an action word. If we do what we can everyday for another person, we have turned prayer into an active word.**

**At the end of this Gospel reading, Jesus leaves us with these words to ponder. “This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your** **ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” Jesus is talking about the manna from heaven the ancestors ate. He’s saying the manna for the ancestors came from heaven but not from Jesus. He’s telling us if we eat the bread given to us from heaven we will not die. Of course, our physical selves will die. But our souls will never die.**

**There is a commitment when we partake of communion; when we say we lift our hearts to the Lord, we are making a commitment. We are answering we will lift our hearts to the Lord; we can realize in this simple act we are surrendering ourselves to Jesus’ two commandments to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. These are not always easy things to do. Yet, when we take part in a Eucharist, we are fortified by the heavenly gift of Jesus’ love for every one of us. Amen**