**Jesus as The Bread of Life**

 **I had to go back and look at last week’s lectionary, thinking this can’t be right. Because we’ve already had two lectionary readings on the importance of the bread of life. But yes, this is the third in a series of lectionaries on Jesus proclaiming he is the bread of life. Then I looked up next week’s Gospel lesson, and I’ll give you one guess on what that reading is about… Right, a slightly different take on Jesus saying, “I am the bread of life.” I’m going to be like Scarlet O’Hara in “Gone with the Wind” when she said to Rett Butler, “I’ll think about it tomorrow.” I’ll think about the relatively same lectionary reading tomorrow. And I do start thinking about every next Sunday’s sermon on Monday morning. Yet most of the of the lectionary readings are not four weeks of closely-related lessons. I know we’re getting this grouping of readings because the reality is Jesus is the bread of life and it’s important. Jesus, the bread of life, is one of the most important foundational cores in our Christian beliefs.**

**Here are my thoughts for this week’s Gospel reading reminding us Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus often told different groups of people who gathered around him he is the bread of life. He wanted them to know and every one of us to know the importance of our weekly communion service. When Jesus told the crowds of people who gathered to listen to him, “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever,” it is no idle or simple concept. He is saying the same thing to us, when we eat the bread from Christ we will live forever. To understand how this is possible, open your hearts. We will live forever in a place I would call the ever-lasting age of the New Jerusalem. We will continue to live in a new form, in a new way where Jesus, his Father and the Holy Spirit abide always with us. His words are simple and everlasting: when we eat the bread and drink the wine at our communion, there is a mystery that occurs. Ordinary bread and wine turns into the body and blood of Jesus. Because of this amazing mystery, we will live forever in the abiding love of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**I thought the Old Testament reading from The Book of Wisdom was a beautiful introduction to Christ, the bread of Life. In these verses, Wisdom related what Jesus will tell those who listen to him many centuries later. She wrote, “…to those without sense…come eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.” In many ways Jesus told those gathered around him to turn to him and he’s saying the same thing to us, to trust him, to gain the sense of the wise and give up foolish ways. But even if we don’t give up foolish ways, even if we don’t have good sense, we are still welcomed by Jesus to come to his table and as he told us we can partake of the new bread and wine he offered us so freely. As he said, Take eat, this is my body of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many, do this in remembrance of me. Way before Jesus ever came into the world, Wisdom told us even if we don’t have good sense, we are still welcome at Jesus’ table. Who among us some time or other doesn’t have good sense?**

**She also wrote, “Lay aside immaturity and live, and walk in the way of insight.” Jesus is saying the same thing to all of us in many ways, because he wants us to walk with insight. Yet even if we don’t, we are still welcome at his table. Christ knows we all attempt to be full of insight, to be wise and have good sense. But when we stumble, when we can’t see how to move forward, when we are hurting and lose the sight of our Lord’s constant and everlasting love, he always invites us to his table, He always is saying to us, “Come to me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.” He offers us the comfort of his Holy Table whenever we participate in our Eucharistic service.**

**It seems a long time ago in a far- off place, but there was a time when no one was able to partake of the bread and wine unless they were baptized and confirmed. I’m sure this is still the practice in many Episcopal churches throughout our country. I’m grateful, by the grace of God, I landed in the Diocese of Chicago. Our bishop is a loving man with an open heart, and I don’t believe he would turn anyone away from receiving the bread and wine, the wonderful celebration of the Eucharist instituted by Jesus.**

**In all the references to Jesus as the bread of life, I have never read in Jesus’ words any caveats on some people are eligible to receive Holy Communion and other people are not. The way of Jesus is always open to all who choose it; there are no exceptions and no exclusions. The rules and regulations to exclude people from communion are made by people, not by Jesus. The rationale for this kind of exclusion must sound something like this, we want those who receive communion to know the whys and wherefores before they are eligible to receive the bread and wine of Jesus. Yet I have never read in any of Jesus’ words stipulations about who can receive communion.**

**I love receiving everyone for communion who chooses to share in this life-giving gift of the body and blood of Jesus. I’m glad we don’t have an altar rail, where all of you would have to kneel to receive the bread from heaven. I want to be able to look everyone in the eyes when I hand them the bread from Christ. I love the little children reaching up wanting a piece of the bread of life just like their mother or father. I have faith this living bread will change people, make them better over time without having to add man- made rules or regulations. I’m happy when I can be a servant in the mystical moments when ordinary bread and wine are turned into the bread from heaven the bread of life. Amen**