

Of Fishes and Loaves

Realities of Living in Abundance



All Saints Parish

Stewardship is...

Everything after I say, “I believe”.

For the “everything” we all need help, all the time.

As a parish we have been exploring how to transform all of the “money” elements of All Saints and our personal lives from tiresome exercises in operating and capital budgets to life-giving enterprises of stewardship of “everyday things” and “enduring things”. We are trying to understand how our practices can be clear examples of entry points to Christian stewardship. We need not to get bogged down trying to meet secular standards. With God everything is possible. We are people of hope, called to live a theology of abundance.

The letter of invitation to house meetings during Lent 2003 noted that...

We are joined in faith and nurtured by the Sacraments so that we can love and serve God with gladness and singleness of heart. We do this in our life together as people of God, just as each of us undertakes a faithful witness of Christ as Lord each hour of each day of our lives.

The meetings focused on understanding *legacy*, providing the opportunity for both theological and practical reflection on the ordering of our lives and worldly goods. On March 30 in his sermon and at a workshop, Fred Osborn, the Director of Philanthropic Services of the Episcopal Church Foundation, talked about the miracle of sharing God’s gifts, specifically how we, as Christians, deal with the end of our lives – our planned giving. On June 1 a panel (including parishioners Hugh and Mary Dunlap) offered a workshop on specifics of planned giving as stewardship.

During the summer 2003, prior to the morning service, parishioners, clergy and the morning’s preacher gathered for study of the morning’s Gospel portion. The Gospel themes through the summer included...

- Being afraid to act on faith
- Miracles — yes, fishes and loaves was among them!
- The source of evil
- Jesus, the bread of life.

Each reading was rich in opportunity to consider faith in action.

In particular these questions were posed...

- ❖ In what ways does this passage prompt actions in your “everyday” life? Why?
- ❖ In what ways does this passage prompt actions relating to things of “enduring” importance to you? Why?

These are question that are appropriately asked about each Scripture passage, whenever heard or read.

Those who were called to preach in the summer of 2003 pondered these questions. The sermons they prepared, and the readings, are presented here, a gift from God for the people of God.

Stewardship Committee

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Preachers

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David A. Killian has been Rector at All Saints since January 1992.

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Leslie K. Sterling is Associate Rector at All Saints. She has been at All Saints since 2001.

The mission of All Saints Parish is to be a community — searching to know and accept God's purpose for us. Uplifted by worship together, sustained by a sense of Christ being in our midst, and inspired by the Holy Spirit to become more than we are, here, and in the world.

It's Not Easy Being A Prophet

Proper 9B 6 July 2003

Sue Singer

Ezekiel 2: 1-7, Psalm 123

2 Corinthians 12: 2-9, Mark 6: 1-6

If today's three Scriptures could have a theme song, I think it would be Kermit the Frog singing, "It's not easy being green." All of them reveal that it's really not easy being a prophet, a person speaking the Word of God. And all of them reveal that it's really not easy hearing a prophet, someone through whom God is speaking to us, even if that person is Jesus himself.

If I had been Ezekiel I would have run like crazy from God's call! God is completely up front with him about exactly how difficult it is going to be to prophesy to the people of Israel. Interestingly, Ezekiel isn't given his exact message at this stage – just the call to be the person who says, "Thus says the Lord," which is synonymous with being a prophet. But we can guess that it will involve the kinds of things the prophets always need to say: calling the people of Israel back, out of whatever kind of idolatry they've gotten themselves into this time, back to the Covenant, back to true worship, back to justice and righteousness, back to living as if they are really God's people and not a bunch of independent operators who think they can do as they please.

And it's not going to be a popular message. The people are, we are told several times, "a rebellious house," "impudent and stubborn," and reading between the lines it's apparent that even God is not optimistic about the prospect of them hearing the prophetic message. Going to prophesy among them will be like surrounded by briars and thorns and poisonous scorpions. But "do not be afraid of their words and do not be dismayed at their looks," says God, and we can almost hear Ezekiel thinking, "Uh, sure God, anything you say..."

It's not easy being a prophet.

It's important to put ourselves in the place of the rebellious people in this Scripture, because I think our tendency is to assume that we couldn't possibly be as bad as they are, as hardened, as hostile, or as uncaring about God's message. But a prophetic message is pretty well invariably the kind of message that brings out all those rebellious qualities in those who hear it. If the people were willing to listen, if they were just waiting to say, "Well for gosh sakes, of course you're right, we'll just amend our lives right away," then there wouldn't be any need for prophets at all.

Prophets are needed in the first place because people (and that includes us) can get so deep into sin that we can end up thinking that black is white if we're not careful – and of course we aren't likely to be pleased with the person who is sent to correct our misapprehension. So it's important for us to pay attention to those things that God appears to be saying to us that really put our backs up, that outrage us, that make us want to start justifying ourselves, or even cause us to start behaving just as badly as the stubborn and rebellious people of Ezekiel. Because those are the things that just might be the prophetic voice of God.

The church at Corinth was one of the first churches founded by the apostle Paul, and they were as ornery a group of people as you could wish to meet! Opinionated, status-conscious, easily swayed by the latest spiritual fad that came along, and not given to a great deal of reflection before jumping on board with the fashionable new thing. Some have said that they resemble the people of my hometown of San Francisco, and I must admit I can see a small likeness! They have been giving Paul a hard time because he is not as spectacular, well-spoken, charismatic, or fashionable as some other prophets that have been working among them.

And in the passage we heard today, he is at the end of having a rather unattractive whine about how badly they have been treating him. He is talking in a coy, third-person way about his own mystical experiences, and how he could, if he wanted to, claim just

as much spiritual insight as his rivals. But then he hits on the nugget of truth about his role as a prophet: that the power of Christ in him is manifested, and indeed made perfect, in his very weakness. And all of a sudden Paul rings true; he assumes his full stature as a prophet of his crucified Lord.

It's important for the Corinthians to realize that even when Paul is coming across as an unattractive whiner, even when his unassuming presence and less than spectacular persona are clearly apparent, what he is speaking to them are words of truth about Jesus their Lord. And it's the same for us. I can't tell you how many times my cheeks have burned with shame when I have inwardly "written off" a participant in a discussion, or a preacher, or especially a person giving testimony on a street corner, only to be stopped in my tracks by the truth and grace of a word from God coming straight from their lips to my ear. Prophets aren't necessarily always the most engaging or attractive or exalted people, even when they are speaking God's truth, and it's important to pay attention to that.

The rejection of Jesus by those in his hometown is a curious and ominous storm cloud in an otherwise sunny sky. Jesus' public ministry has been progressing spectacularly well up to this point, and he is about to send the twelve disciples out on a successful preaching and healing mission. But those in his own town cannot come to terms with his clear prophetic status, and his hands are tied among them: "he could do no deed of power there." The Gospel writer says he was "amazed" – I would guess he was also frustrated and deeply grieved.

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for their unbelief. Was it too much of a stretch of the imagination for them to see "the carpenter" in this new role? Was it jealousy that Jesus was not confining his ministry (and its benefits) to his own people? Was there something in his teaching that touched a nerve in them?

We can never know exactly why his own people took such offense at him, but we can be warned by the word used to describe their feelings, which can also be translated "they stumbled." Jesus became more and more of a stumbling block to people as his

ministry progressed. He described himself as rejected cornerstone on which people would stumble. Paul describes the cross of Jesus as a stumbling block to those unwilling to come to terms with a vulnerable God. And the first indications of the passion and death of Jesus are hinted at here, when his own people "stumble" over who he is.

My hunch is that Jesus – who he was, what he said, what he did – moved the good people of his hometown just a little too far out of their comfortable and established ways of thinking. They were probably quite unprepared for the breaking in of God's Reign that Jesus proclaimed, and unwilling to do the hard work of figuring out how their lives would have to change in response to the justice and healing and new life Jesus was offering. And the fact that Jesus was one of their own added insult to injury – how dare he upset the established order in this way?

There is a way in which we, as individual believers and members of the Church, now stand in the place of Jesus' hometown neighbors. Jesus is, after all, "ours," after so many centuries, isn't he? But do we try to domesticate him to the extent that we can no longer hear the challenge of his message or experience the power of his touch? Are we the ones in danger of stumbling over him?

In times like these, in the life of the world and the church right now, we need all the warnings we can get about the necessity to listen out for and then listen to the prophets among us. The candidates for the next Presidential election are already on our screens and in our airwaves, each claiming to be the next secular prophet this country should heed. In the upcoming General Convention of our own church difficult issues will be raised, opinions will run high, and many people will claim to speak with a prophetic voice. Sometimes we ourselves will find ourselves called to take up the difficult mantle of the prophet, in our civic or congregational or working lives.

The big question when it comes to being a prophet or hearing a prophet is, "How do we know that God's truth is being spoken here? How do we know that we are neither giving divine sanction to our own selfish desires or willfully ignoring the voice of God?" Our Scriptures today tell us that it's important to pay attention

when we're tempted to dismiss something because it gets our backs, up, makes us angry, and especially when it challenges a point of view that is comfortable for and beneficial to us. We need to bear in mind too that sometimes the most unexpected people can speak a word from God, and be ready both to hear and to be one of those people. Above all we should never try to domesticate God, but be open to the radical newness of Jesus' message, and the life he offers us.

And the "test" for everything presented to us as prophecy, or that we might feel called to speak as prophecy is found in the two criteria in today's Collect: do these words challenge us to greater love of God and neighbor? That's the bottom line – whether what we speak and obey leads us to be "devoted to God with our whole heart and united to one another with pure affection." It's not easy being – or hearing – a prophet. But we are promised that the grace and power of Christ, the prophet without honor in his hometown, is made perfect in weakness: even in the weakness of our witness and obedience.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 9B

Collect: *O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Ezekiel 2:1-7

1 He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. 2 And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. 3 He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. 4 The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 5 Thus says the Lord GOD." 5 Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. 6 And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. 7 You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house.

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

2 I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. 3 And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— 4 was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. 5 On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. 6 But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will

be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, 7 even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. 8 Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, 9 but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Mark 6:1-6

1 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offense at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' 5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.

Psalm 123

1 To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
2 As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us.
3 Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.
4 Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

Serenity of Christ
Proper 10B 12/13 July 2003
David A. Killian

Amos 7:1-15, Psalm 85
Ephesians 1:1-14, Mark 6: 7-13

I

Yesterday, members of the Property Committee held their monthly meeting at 8:30 a.m. and then at 9:30 went outside to tear down and remove the old, rusted tool shed and to install a new rust-resistant shed under the trees outside the parish house. Charlie Rigg, Property Chair, gave some instructions and there were guidelines from Home Depot on how to lay the footings and assemble the shed. The volunteers worked well as a team and by 2:00, they had followed their instructions and completed the project, a job well done!

In today's Gospel, Jesus assembles his disciples for a project and gives them instructions as he sends them out on mission. Let's look his guidelines: first, he sends them out "two by two," second, he gives them "authority over unclean spirits," third, he orders them to take very little for their journey, fourth, he tells them to expect a good welcome, and fifth, he tells them not to brood over rejection or to force results.

First, he sends them out two by two. Why did he do that? Jesus knew that "two heads are better than one" and that one person is not the repository of total wisdom. He knew that the disciples would do a better job if they worked as a team instead of as "lone rangers." Actually, to think about it, even the Lone Ranger had a partner, Tonto, so he wasn't really a Lone Ranger. Jesus understood that ministry could be difficult and the disciples might be tempted to give up. In trying times, doesn't one need another to lean on, get advice from, and to share one's struggles? The Celtic missionaries understood this: they went two by two and often in groups of twelve, as Columba did when he began the

mission to Iona. There is a wonderful Celtic term, *anam chara*, soul friend, that expresses this sense of partnering, sharing one's passion and one's dreams with another. Elise Feyerherm and John Clabeaux have done their music ministry at the Saturday Celtic worship service the past three years as a team. They have been *anam chara* for one another in a profound way. By sending the disciples out "two by two" Jesus teaches that we need support in our ministry, someone who tells us the truth and shares our successes and failures.

II

Second, Jesus gives the disciples "authority over unclean spirits." In our modern age, we are perhaps uncomfortable with the notion of "unclean spirits." Well, even if we don't believe that there are demons or leprechauns lurking around corners to snare us, aren't the biggest obstacles we face those of a spiritual nature? Often, what trips us up most are our own bad attitudes, such as unrealistic expectations, learned helplessness, and giving up. For example, the "unclean spirit" of unrealistic expectations tells us: "You can change other people and make them do what you want them to do." But this is unrealistic; we can't change other people. So we get frustrated by our inability to change others, and we get discouraged, and the "unclean spirit" of learned helplessness chimes in: "You can't change anything, you are a victim of your circumstances, the deck is stacked against you." And this is followed by the "unclean spirit" of giving up that says: "Since you're a victim and helpless, just quit and do nothing!" The unclean spirits then have triumphed! But Jesus gives us authority over unclean spirits. How does his authority work? His authority is like the power of the serenity prayer of the 12-step groups. "O God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." There is tremendous power in this prayer. **The serenity to accept what I cannot change** - be at peace with myself, serene, calm, so that I can recognize what I cannot change, such as other people. **The courage to change what I can** - I am not a victim, I am not helpless. Some things I can change, such as myself. **The wisdom to know the difference.** Say this prayer each

day, especially when dealing with entrenched bad attitudes, and gradually you will gain power and authority over the unclean spirits. Thousands of people do and they have found its power to liberate and be set free.

III

Third, Jesus tells them to take very little for their journey. If you want to give someone the good news of Christ, you don't need to give the Articles of Religion or the Summa Theologica. I am not demeaning theological education, but I am reminded that St. Thomas Aquinas, probably the greatest theologian in the history of Christianity, said that the lived faith of a peasant was more pleasing to God than the weightiest arguments of theologians. Marshall McLuhan said, "The Medium is the Message." When Jesus says to take very little, he teaches that the messengers themselves are the message. The disciples themselves attract people to Christ, as they did in the early Church, when people said, "See how those Christians love one another." Today's epistle to the Ephesians reminds us that we are God's children, blessed with every spiritual blessing, and our very lives give testimony to God.

Fourth, he tells them to expect a good welcome and to present the message only to those open to hear it. Stay in their homes long enough so the message can become part of their lives and transform their culture.

Fifth, he tells them not to brood over rejection or to force your message upon people. In other words, don't expect 100% results. Faith depends on free will. If the person you speak to is not ready for your message, depart. Leave the person alone. Don't coerce, don't keep battering on the door trying to wear the person down. Over the centuries, missionaries have planted the Christian faith all over the world, thankfully mainly in a gentle and persuasive manner. Where the message of faith was accepted willingly, Christianity brought education, improved health care, and elevated the status of women and children. Sadly, in certain periods, coercion was employed to convert people to Christianity, something totally at odds with the teaching of Jesus. The Gospel

here is clear: if people will not accept the message, then leave them alone, really and symbolically, by shaking the dust off your feet.

Do you like stories with a happy ending? Today's Gospel has a happy result. The disciples did as Jesus instructed and they proclaimed the good news, banished unclean spirits, and cured the sick. Jesus invites us to have a good ending also as he sends us forth to do the work he has given us to do. May we heed his word and follow his teaching. *Amen.*

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 10B

Collect: *O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Amos 7: 7 - 15

7 This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. 8 And the LORD said to me, "A'mos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; 9 the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jerobo'am with the sword." 10 Then Amazi'ah, the priest of Beth'el, sent to King Jerobo'am of Israel, saying, "A'mos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. 11 For thus A'mos has said, "Jerobo'am shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land." 12 And Amazi'ah said to A'mos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; 13 but never again prophesy at Beth'el, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." 14 Then A'mos answered Amazi'ah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, 15 and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

Ephesians 1: 1 - 14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Eph'esus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Mark 6: 7 - 13

7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." 12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Psalm 85

- 1 You have been gracious to your land, O Lord, you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.
- 2 You have forgiven the iniquity of your people and blotted out all their sins.
- 3 You have withdrawn all your fury and turned yourself from your wrathful indignation.
- 4 Restore us then, O God our Savior; let your anger depart from us.
- 5 Will you be displeased with us for ever? Will you prolong your anger from age to age?
- 6 Will you not give us life again,
that your people may rejoice in you?
- 7 Show us your mercy, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.
- 8 I will listen to what the Lord God is saying,
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him.
- 9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Mercy and truth have met together;
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
- 11 Truth shall spring up from the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
- 12 The Lord will indeed grant prosperity, and our land will yield its increase.
- 13 Righteousness shall go before him, and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

Peace to those far off and near
Proper 11B 19 July 2003, at Celtic Eucharist
Elise A. Feyrherm

Isaiah 57:14b-21, Psalm 22:22_30
Ephesians 2:11-22, Mark 6: 30-44

The Lord says to us here and now, “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” May it be so with us today, in this place: may God dwell with us who are humble, and may God revive our spirits this night, through my words. *Amen.*

It is a privilege to be able to interpret the scripture readings with you this night, with you, a community I have tried to serve for the last three years, and whose presence and worship have sustained me and enriched my life. As you know, John and I are packing up to move to Illinois this coming Tuesday. This Eucharist is something of an oasis in the midst of a great deal of chaos in our lives and especially in our house. I have been packing it seems nonstop for the last week. I confess that I feel something like those intrepid monks who left the safe shores of Ireland, afloat in their tiny coracles without a paddle, ready to drift wherever God would lead them. And I now have a greater appreciation for Isaiah’s terribly appropriate words: “There is no peace for the wicked.”

We come together this night as a people somewhat on the margins of things. As those who seek to follow Jesus Christ, we are already on the margins of modern society, no matter what George Bush may say. We follow a man, a God, who asks us to challenge accepted norms of increasing consumption, wealth, power and prestige. We follow a savior who models and invites us into a life which to the rest of the world looks like death, or at least irrelevance. And here, on a Saturday night, we are also on the margins of this parish community, a parish known for its erudition, taste, artistic excellence, and political clout. We are not a large worshipping community; we do not have a big choir with

renowned professional leadership. We sing folksongs, not Bach chorales. We do not carry a whole lot of economic or political clout in this parish. But here we are, gathering together around the table of Jesus, with his body and blood raised up among us and given to us as food.

The readings from God’s word which were proclaimed for us this night have a special and poignant meaning for this particular community at this particular time in its life, I think. God has a word of comfort and encouragement and challenge for us all this night. Hear, for example, the words of God through the prophet Isaiah: “I dwell with those who are contrite and humble in spirit.” Hear also the words of the author of the letter to the Ephesians: “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.” Both Isaiah and the letter to the Ephesians are speaking to those on the margins, those who in the eyes of the world are insignificant, too small and demoralized to make a difference, viewed with skepticism by those who have influence and power. Isaiah’s hearers are an exiled and scattered people, the people of Israel whose homeland has been taken away and who are as nothing in the eyes of those with political, economic, and religious strength. The Ephesians have accepted Christ but have been treated with hostility as aliens and strangers in their own faith, because they were not Jews first before Jesus entered their lives and transformed them. The folk who gather on the hillside to listen to Jesus are far from their homes, without food, without direction, as Mark tells us, “like sheep without a shepherd.”

The Celtic church flourished far from the centers of power. Its monastic communities and the ordinary folk who surrounded them lived simply, even crudely, without great cathedrals or sophisticated programs. The Celtic Christian community dwelt, it would seem, on the margins, both of Europe and of Christianity; by today’s megachurch standards, Celtic Christians were not in the groove. And yet this is our model. We have chosen to worship in the Celtic manner not out of some cultural infatuation, or a desire to be “in” or “cool,” but in part because this way of experiencing God keeps us in touch with contrition and humility,

with the “greatness of the small,” as one of John Bell’s songs puts it.

A popular book from the seventies on economic and cultural values asserted in its title that “Small is Beautiful,” but we have this truth on even greater authority. For we have been told that small is not only beautiful: small is beloved by God. The disenfranchised, the powerless, the slightly odd, the economically disadvantaged, have been assured by the Lord that they too are citizens and members of the household of God.

How are we to respond to this amazing declaration? The problem with being small and poor is that it is all too easy to begin to believe what everybody else is saying about you, that you really aren’t worth very much, or certainly not worth the money that has been poured into you and your activities. The myth of scarcity takes hold, and we start to believe that we don’t have enough to sustain our own lives, let alone give generously to others.

But Jesus has a specific word for us here. When his disciples come to him on the hillside, telling him that the people are hungry and he needs to do something, they are also no doubt themselves tired, hungry, and devoid of resources. Or so they think. But Jesus has no pity: instead he tells them: “You give them something to eat.” “You give them something to eat.” And we all too well sympathize with their incredulous response: “Us?! We’re supposed to come up with the cash and staff to feed all these people?”

“Yes, you. You in your smallness, your weakness, your insufficient cash flow. You with your dubious reputation, your low-brow culture. You with your paltry numbers, your lack of organization. You give them something to eat.”

Why? Because you have been fed. You have been loved. And because you have been called. The Lord dwells with you, the humble and contrite.

Embedded in the Celtic tradition is a deep sense of hospitality, of welcoming the stranger, of sharing food and drink. But this hospitality doesn’t always flow from material abundance. The Celtic lands were stark, and life was hard. But there was always enough to share. Lives were lived abundantly, and generously.

A poem attributed to Saint Brigid embodies this joyful generosity, a generosity of material goods but especially of spirit. Brigid proclaims:

I would like to have the men of Heaven in my own house;
with vats of good cheer laid out for them.
I would like to have the three Marys, their fame is so great.
I would like people from every corner of Heaven.
I would like them to be cheerful in their drinking.
I would like to have Jesus, too, here amongst them.
I would like a great lake of beer for the King of Kings.
I would like to be watching Heaven’s family drinking it
through all eternity.

(translated by Sean O’Faolain)

We are few in number, but God has called us to give of our hearts and of our goods. We are beloved of God, and we too can have the people of heaven and of earth in our own house. We too may, and indeed must, lay the banquet for God’s people.

How, you may ask? What can we offer? Those who know what it is like to be on the margins can offer a special kind of hospitality to others who feel excluded, ignored, disparaged. Because you know what it is to be small, you can offer refuge and comfort to others who are not sure where they fit in this world that values size and influence. This community has already provided strength to the weak, comfort to those who are sorrowful, peace to those who are embattled and angry. We are already a testimony to Christian unity across denominations and even within communions. In a sometimes harsh and frightening spiritual wilderness, we have already provided refuge. At the risk of sounding grandiose, I could even liken the ministry of this community to that of the great third century father of the Egyptian desert, St. Antony, who

though he was but one man, in an isolated backwater, held out his arms and offered what he had to those who came on pilgrimage to his hermitage. It has been said of Antony,

It was as if he were a physician given to Egypt by God. For who went to him grieving and did not return rejoicing? Who went in lamentation over his dead, and did not immediately put aside his sorrow? Who visited while angered and was not changed to affection? What poor person met him in exhaustion who did not, after hearing and seeing him, despise wealth and console himself in his poverty? What monk, coming to him in discouragement, did not become all the stronger? What young man, coming to the mountain and looking at Antony, did not at once renounce pleasures and love moderation? Who came to him tempted by a demon and did not gain relief? And who came to him distressed in his thoughts and did not find his mind calmed?¹

The desert fathers such as Antony are the spiritual ancestors and mentors of the Celtic Christians who sought God in another kind of wilderness. Like Antony, and like his Celtic descendants, we trust not in ourselves but in the love and power of the God who feeds and calls us. This ancient call is our call as well.

Dare to believe I come for you, says Jesus. Dare to believe I will feed you and help you to feed other.

As John and I leave this place to begin life anew in another place, I take comfort in the blessing that has been given us through this community, in its worship, in its prayer and fellowship. But most of all I entrust all of us into the hands of the God who brings peace not only to those who are near, but to those who are far off. May Christ hold all of us in the palm of his hand, and may we find strength to bring his abundance to all whom we meet. *Amen.*

¹ Athanasius, "The Life of Antony" in *Athanasius -- The Life of Antony and The Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) p.94.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 11B

Collect: *Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our worthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Isaiah 57: 14b - 21

14b "Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way." 15 For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. 16 For I will not continually accuse, nor will I always be angry; for then the spirits would grow faint before me, even the souls that I have made. 17 Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry; I struck them, I hid and was angry; but they kept turning back to their own ways. 18 I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will lead them and repay them with comfort, creating for their mourners the fruit of the lips. 19 Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the LORD; and I will heal them. 20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud. 21 There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

Ephesians 2: 11 - 22

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"--a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands-- 12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he

is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Mark 6: 30 - 44

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. 35 When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii {The denarius was the usual day's wage for a laborer} worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" 38 And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the

green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And all ate and were filled; 43 and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Psalm 22

- 22 Praise the Lord, you that fear him; stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel; all you of Jacob's line, give glory.
- 23 For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither does he hide his face from them; but when they cry to him he hears them.
- 24 My praise is of him in the great assembly; I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.
- 25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him: "May your heart live for ever!"
- 26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations bow before him.
- 27 For kingship belongs to the Lord; he rules over the nations.
- 28 To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; all who go down to the dust fall before him.
- 29 My soul shall live for him; my descendants shall serve him; they shall be known as the Lord's for ever.
- 30 They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn the saving deeds that he has done.

Their Minds Were Closed

Proper 12B 26/27 July 2003

Anne Marie Ellis

*2 Kings 2:1-15, Psalm 114
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16, Mark 6: 45-52*

I'd like you to imagine that you are living in 6th century Scotland or Ireland. Men in simple robes with hoods have been traveling around the countryside. They make simple huts for shelter, plant gardens and raise sheep. They use the sheep skins to make "books". They come to your hut telling marvelous stories of a people of long ago from a book called the Bible. Some of the stories are about a prophet who can part water with his mantle and walk on the river as if on dry land. This same prophet gives this power, this Spirit, to his pupil after he ascends to heaven in a chariot of fire. The monks, as they call themselves, chant songs which tell stories that touch the human heart and give hope; songs of mountains that skip like rams and hills like little lambs. The Celts would certainly have listened intently to word pictures like that. Mountains and hills with sheep and cattle were all around them. Nature was also a big part of their spiritual world. Until I went to Iona in April I thought lambs skipping and jumping was a story, but they really do leap about and bump heads. They are quite comical.

And these men in the robes with hoods talked about a man named Jesus who could walk on water and quiet the wind. The Celts lived with mountains, lakes and seas. They understood about and believed in ghosts and other worlds. They probably empathized with the disciples who were alone in the boat, straining at the oars. They would have shared in the disciple's astonishment.

I, however, was having trouble empathizing with the disciples. What was their problem? Jesus had sent them out to cast out demons and spread the Gospel and they did it. Jesus had asked them to help feed the crowd, and their five loaves and two fish had been shared and they retrieved baskets of the leftovers. And now Jesus appears on the water, tells them who he is, quiets the water

and they don't understand. As someone in bible study at prison said "they were probably so intent on their work, rowing the boat and keeping afloat, they had no room in their minds and hearts for a Savior who could help them." Their hearts were hardened or "Their minds were closed" as one translation read Friday night says.

And then I started to write this sermon, snippets of ideas written on the back of the lessons. When David asked me months ago I said, "Oh sure, those lessons are a snap. It almost writes itself." But a different kind of ghost appeared to me Wednesday night. This was the ghost of "What do you think you're doing, writing a sermon to give in front of all those people? Who will want to listen to you? You're not ordained or (Elise or John) Ludger. And you haven't done it for so long." Ghosts come in all forms.

But "each of us is given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift." And who knows, my gift may be preaching?

The Celts were ready to receive the Word of God. The Irish missionaries took the tales of magic wells and spirits and made a religion that the Celts could believe in. And it worked. Eventually Irish missionaries went all over Europe, teaching and spreading a word of hope and love. They didn't think, "I can't do this, where is the money to come from, how will I meet my budget?" They just did it. No ghosts got in the way.

Much like Paul did in the first century. The author of Ephesians is probably not Paul. Disappointed? Well, I'm not sure it matters because whoever it was has some important points to make. This part — ***To lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*** — really speaks to me.

To what have I been called? To what have you been called? It is certainly not a calling to be afraid of the ghosts. Not the ghost of doubt, as I was, or the ghost of scarcity. It doesn't take money to spread the Gospel, as we learned two weeks ago. The disciples

were sent out two by two, taking nothing with them — no money, no bread, no extra clothes. It didn't take money to feed the 5000. It just took faith to get them to share what they had. It doesn't take money to get in the boat and calm the water. It takes faith. It takes minds open to possibilities and to opportunities.

So what are we called to? We are called to lead this life, this life of abundant possibilities and opportunities, **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.** Humility, gentleness and patience come from knowing that we cannot do this work alone. The disciples were alone on the lake, fighting against the storm. They didn't expect Jesus to come, walking on the water, to help them and to calm the storm, so they were afraid when they saw him. They didn't understand. Their minds were closed.

Is it different for us, you and me? Are we alone in our boats, rowing desperately against our personal storms? Are we also forgetting Jesus? Will we also not recognize his presence?

I believe that we cannot do anything without God's help. Not one thing. If you try to row your own boat, you will sink. You need, and I need Jesus in our boats. You need, and I need Jesus to calm our waters. We need to be, with God's help, **with one another in love.**

Do you recognize this line from Ephesians? ***There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.*** You'll find it on page 299 of the Book of Common Prayer. We recite it at every celebration of Holy Baptism. We are one body. We can answer God's call, here, in this place and out there in the world. We can do it together and we can do it for and with Jesus. We just need to remember to "let him into the boat." Don't let him pass by. Recognize him. Touch his garment. Let him feed us.

Please take out your lesson leaflet and let us pray the collect together.

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 12B

Collect: *O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

2 Kings 2: 1 - 15

1 Now when the LORD was about to take Eli'jah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Eli'jah and Eli'sha were on their way from Gil'gal. 2 Eli'jah said to Eli'sha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Beth'el." But Eli'sha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Beth'el. 3 The company of prophets who were in Beth'el came out to Eli'sha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent." 4 Eli'jah said to him, "Eli'sha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Eli'sha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." 6 Then Eli'jah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Eli'jah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. 9 When they had crossed, Eli'jah said to Eli'sha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Eli'sha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." 10 He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." 11 As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two

of them, and Eli'jah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. 12 Eli'sha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. 13 He picked up the mantle of Eli'jah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 He took the mantle of Eli'jah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Eli'jah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Eli'sha went over. 15 When the company of prophets who were at Jericho saw him at a distance, they declared, "The spirit of Eli'jah rests on Eli'sha." They came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

Ephesians 4: 1 - 7, 11 - 16

1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. 7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Mark 6: 45 - 52

45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsa'ida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray. 47 When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. 49 But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 51 Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Psalm 114

- 1 Hallelujah! When Israel came out of Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,
- 2 Judah became God's sanctuary and Israel his dominion.
- 3 The sea beheld it and fled;
Jordan turned and went back.
- 4 The mountains skipped like rams,
and the little hills like young sheep.
- 5 What ailed you, O sea, that you fled?
O Jordan, that you turned back?
- 6 You mountains, that you skipped like rams?
you little hills like young sheep?
- 7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
- 8 Who turned the hard rock into a pool of water
and flint-stone into a flowing spring.

It's not your movie
Proper 13B — 2/3 August 2003
Thomas E. Nutt-Powell

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15 Psalm 78
Ephesians 4:17-25, John 6:24-35

Introduction

This is a stewardship sermon. Of course in some fundamental sense every sermon is a stewardship sermon. For those of you who are avid readers of *Saints Alive!*, you will remember this from the most recent edition—

Stewardship is... Everything after I say, "I believe"

And perhaps you will also remember the next sentence:

For the "everything" we all need help, all the time.

We get help many ways. We especially get help as we study the Bible, attempting to understand what impact the Scriptures have on our own lives, how the word of God prompts us to act.

So let us then turn to today's lessons.

Lessons

First our religious forebears, the Israelites, in a story set forth in Exodus and retold in the Psalm. Here we find the first telling of today's lessons, about a bunch of self-centered whiners, with short memories, complaining about their fate. Oy, what a bunch a losers, is what I think. "If only we had..." they say. "Why did you make us do this?" they moan. "Give us what we want", they demand. And then, even when God provides the "bread of angels" (despite all the kvetching) they don't even know what they have received. Well, I'm sure glad I'm not like that, say I --- at my sanctimonious best.

Next our second set of religious forebears, the Gentiles, or, in some translations, the heathens, and the former gentiles, the church at Ephesus. The writer of this letter reminds the reader of the futility of the former ways, the loss of sensitivity, licentiousness, lust, greed, the use of falsehoods to get ahead. I don't know about your take, but this sure seems like reality

TV to me, just in case you thought all this had to do with only "back then".

Now let's consider the Gospel, and indeed those of the past two weeks. The crowds once again find Jesus, and start asking for what they want. They are operating in their movie, by their script. "When did you come here? When are we going to get more?" they ask, with more than a little irritation in their voices, I'd guess. You can hear the sub-text—"This sneaking around and holding out on us. It's not the way we wrote it." These folks are clearly kindred spirits with the Disciples. You remember the Disciples, a bunch of guys trying to float their own boat? Last week they were so involved in rowing the boat that they didn't even recognize Jesus. And if that's not enough, the week before they thought that just getting enough money was going to solve the needs of the gathered faithful.

Meaning

OK, I've finished my not-so-elegant exegesis of the texts. What does it mean for me, for you, for us? When I was a kid (especially during that wonderful teenage time), my mother would often say to me, in a truly exasperated tone, "Don't just sit there, Do something!" This surely is an American trait, Doing. We are doers, producers (and consumers), we make the world go round.

Or do we? Is life, as we seem to like to think, our movie? Our script? Is life all about what I want? Here's what Jesus says: You are chasing after me because of what you want. Forget about it! Don't spend time on things that don't last. Pay attention to what really matters.

And what Jesus says is a true culture shock, to us perhaps even more than to those gathered by the sea. Reversing the words my mother used, it's

Don't just do something, stand there.

The "work" of God is to believe. To believe, not to do this or that. **To believe.**

God gives life. It's God's movie, not yours or mine. We need to follow the script that matters. And what is that script? What are the sound bites, the storyboard?

Jesus is the bread of life.

Whoever comes to Jesus will not hunger.

Whoever believes in Jesus will never thirst.

Stewardship

I said at the beginning that this is a stewardship sermon. It is about everything (and everything means everything) after I come to Jesus, after I say I believe. If you remember the piece in *Saints Alive!* you may also remember a discussion about money. So in the realm of culture shock, let's actually talk about money in church.

What is money? My son-in-law once showed me a Silver Certificate, and told me of his discussion with a History class he had taught at Northeastern about the differences between a Silver Certificate, a Federal Reserve Note and the Gold Standard. None of the students had known of the differences. And, we concluded, the differences probably don't much matter, as currency has value only insofar as there is a shared belief that its exchange will be fairly reckoned.

In what currency do we trade? What is a fair reckoning for that which we have — for our time, talent and treasure? It surely includes the following...

- ❖ All that we have comes from God. It is not ours.
- ❖ What we have therefore is a gift, not an entitlement.
- ❖ God wants us to care for our gifts, so that they flourish.
- ❖ Gifts flourish when they are shared, not hoarded.

What transformations happen when we realize that...

- ✓ The bread of life does not perish
- ✓ God's love is endless
- ✓ In God's truth we live in abundance not scarcity

I believe this means we no longer get bogged down in trying to meet secular standards. We begin to realize that not only "fish" and "loves", but also "bread" and "oven" are powerful metaphors. We transcend the tiresomeness of operating and capital budgets and begin to undertake life-giving enterprises of stewardship of "everyday things" and "enduring things". We start acting on a fundamental premise...

God decides what I should do. I don't.

Each moment of each day, in everything we do and everything we are, we begin with God. The phone rings; we invite God into the conversation. A meeting starts; we are sure God is with us. It's time to eat; we realize that we are fed by God. This may not seem easy; the alternative is worse.

I listen to the stories of the inmates with whom we do Bible study on Friday evenings. They are stories about the steps they take as they do their walk with Jesus. There are wonderful and uplifting stories, yes. But the truly extraordinary stories are those about the introduction of God into the most ordinary and mundane of daily events, and how God's presence transformed those events, and, as a result, their lives and the lives of those around them. These are your stories, and my stories, and our stories. It is God's boat we are in. Let's be certain God is in there with us.

Amen.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 13B

Collect: *Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Exodus 16: 2 - 4, 9 - 15

2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining." 10 And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 12 "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God." 13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

Ephesians 4: 17 - 25

17 Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. 19 They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 That is not the way you learned Christ! 21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.

John 6: 24 - 35

24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Caper'naum looking for Jesus. 25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 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. 27 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." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread

always." 35 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.

Psalm 78

- 1 Hear my teaching, O my people;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
- 2 I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will declare the mysteries of ancient times.
- 3 That which we have heard and known, and what our forefathers
have told us, we will not hide from their children.
- 4 We will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds
and the power of the Lord, and the wonderful works he has
done.
- 5 He gave his decrees to Jacob and established a law for Israel,
which he commanded them to teach their children;
- 6 That the generations to come might know, and the children yet
unborn; that they in their turn might tell it to their children;
- 7 So that they might put their trust in God, and not forget the
deeds of God, but keep his commandments;
- 8 And not be like their forefathers, a stubborn and rebellious
generation, *a generation whose heart was not steadfast, and
whose spirit was not faithful to God.
- 9 The people of Ephraim, armed with the bow, turned back in
the day of battle;
- 10 They did not keep the covenant of God, and refused to walk
in his law;
- 11 They forgot what he had done, and the wonders he had
shown them.
- 12 He worked marvels in the sight of their forefathers, in the
land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.
- 13 He split open the sea and let them pass through; he made the
waters stand up like walls.
- 14 He led them with a cloud by day, and all the night through
with a glow of fire.
- 15 He split the hard rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink
as from the great deep.
- 16 He brought streams out of the cliff, and the waters gushed out
like rivers.

- 17 But they went on sinning against him, rebelling in the desert
against the Most High.
- 18 They tested God in their hearts, demanding food for their
craving.
- 19 They railed against God and said, "Can God set a table in the
wilderness?"
- 20 True, he struck the rock, the waters gushed out, and the
gullies overflowed; but is he able to give bread or to provide
meat for his people?"
- 21 When the Lord heard this, he was full of wrath; a fire was
kindled against Jacob, and his anger mounted against Israel;
- 22 For they had no faith in God, nor did they put their trust in
his saving power.
- 23 So he commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of
heaven.
- 24 He rained down manna upon them to eat and gave them grain
from heaven.
- 25 So mortals ate the bread of angels; he provided for them food
enough.

Eternal Feeding

Proper 14B — 9/10 August 2003

Jonathan Eden

Deuteronomy 8:1-10, Psalm 34
Ephesians 4:25-5:2, John 6:37-51

“I am the bread that came down from Heaven.” – From today’s gospel reading. “I am the bread of life. Who ever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” – Part of Jesus’ discourse that immediately precedes the reading for today. And again in today’s reading “I am the bread of life . . . This is the bread that comes down from heaven . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” One cannot help but think that God is trying to make a point here . . . and to belabor that point we hear echoes of the sentiment in the reading from Deuteronomy as well, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the Mouth of the Lord.”

The first opportunity I had to consider these verses was in the mountains of Colorado, with a group of youth and adult leaders from this parish, The Journey 2 Adulthood group. We were on a pilgrimage, which was the culmination of 2 years of planning and hard work on behalf of every member of the group. And for me personally, the culmination of 6 years of knowing and working with these kids. Now granted, at the beginning of our trip at our home base of St. Bartholomew’s Church in Estes Park, Co., the metaphor was a bit of a stretch as we were able to rely on the sweet manna of the local church ladies and their casseroles – and being good Episcopalians, the pate from the Safeway around the corner. But beyond that if any of you have ever been on an extended backpacking trip, maybe you can relate to my further thoughts on these verses, which were something along the lines of, “I don’t know about bread, but good Lord I wish I’d packed my granola a little closer to the top because we’ve got a long way to go and no Charlie I don’t know exactly how long it will be to get to our campsite. . .” I’m kidding, sort of. But when you have to carry your food on your back, you do become acutely aware of what is

needed to feed eleven people, certainly in the literal sense, but also as we labored and traveled together we became aware of the need for a deeper, eternal feeding. As providence would have it, the sheet I printed off the All Saints’ website which included the lectionary readings for this week, also included the following, “to be a *Community* -- searching to know and accept God's purpose for us. *uplifted* by worship together, *sustained* by a sense of Christ being in our midst, and *inspired* by the Holy Spirit to become more than we are, here and in the world.” . . . The mission of All Saints Parish . . . for many years now, I have been truly fed in my participation at this Church and as such, I saw the connection of our living out of this mission on our pilgrimage as one of the ways we stayed so well nourished.

At the beginning of our trip, we had the opportunity to help build a memorial labyrinth for our hosts at Saint Bart’s. I’ve always felt that one of the best ways to get to know someone is to labor with them and certainly that laboring towards a goal of a richer spirituality adds another layer to that knowledge. As the hot sun beat down on us in the dry mountain air, we scraped through the rocky granite with hand tools to level the surface, we pounded in spikes to fortify the ground, took measurements and laid the heavy stones of the path and spread sand to hold it all in place, we shed our pretenses, sometimes we were frustrated, but we also innately learned to use the group’s strengths and compensate for its weaknesses . . . “to be a *Community* -- searching to know and accept God's purpose for us.”

We sang together at St. Bart’s Saturday service, some of the braver leaders were cleaned and rejuvenated, in a very Celtic fashion, by plunging, often screaming, into the icy stream near our campsite, we laid hands and prayed over Mina, who had sprained an ankle and Daniel, who struggled with the altitude. We also gazed out over God’s rocky, craggy cathedral as we hiked to Lost Lake and tried to scale Stormy Peak. As we left the mountains, we acknowledged the sacred ground with a blessing. . . *uplifted* by worship together.

When Mina sprained her ankle, fortunately it was not so bad that she could not finish the remaining 2 and a half miles – uphill – to camp, but carrying a backpack was out of the question. So we had to attach one end of her pack to mine, while the kids took turns carrying the other end. Now granted, this was an exercise from which my buttocks have only recently recovered . . . But at the time, as I walked ahead, not being able to see, but necessarily trusting my helper behind me, I truly had a sense of walking with Christ, being a part of the body of Christ. A tangible, visceral knowledge that Christ was with us, holding us close. . . *sustained* by a sense of Christ being in our midst.

As we talked in the evening, we struggled with some difficult questions – did God create man or did man create God? Why do bad things happen to good people? Just as we pushed our physical limits or spiritual boundaries were stretched as well. And our prayers were hopeful, that we might bring some of the spirit that we so tangibly felt on the mountain, back home with us . . . *inspired* by the Holy Spirit to become more than we are, here and in the world.

So there they were, and here they are, a group of young adults that in a very real way, is the embodiment of the mission that is the foundation of this Parish. And this is a truly extraordinary group of young adults. Which I don't say lightly . . . at 13, 14, and 15 this is a group of scholars, artists, activists and mystics. And I promise you that it will be these kids, specifically these kids, that will lead us, one way or another, into the future. It is the extraordinary nature of these kids of that should add weight to our calling and yes, even God's commandment to us to teach and foster our youth. I would point to the last verses of the Book of Matthew, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing . . . and teaching in them to obey everything I have commanded you." Or the opening verses of Psalm 78, where we hear, "He established a decree in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children . . . so that they should not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their ancestors, a

stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God."

Of course I realize that not all of us are called to be teachers, and perhaps even fewer of us are called to sleep on a church basement floor next to the kids, but God does commend to us the responsibility of spiritual formation. Generations of theologians have warned of the dire consequences of neglecting this responsibility, as C.S. Lewis forcefully stated in the 1940's in a critic of an education system that does not foster spirituality, "We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traders in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."

Strong words and you might be beginning to think that this is too much weight to bear – certainly for any one person, but even for the foundation of a church school that meets for only an hour a week – if we're lucky - and sometimes I might tend to agree. But what I can tell you is this, that in the 6 years I have been a part of the church school here, it has transformed from a model based on "religious education," a model that John Westerhoff, an Episcopal theologian and educational commentator and practitioner called "bankrupt" in his book, "Will Our Children Have Faith?" to a model that truly is a ministry, building up a supportive community of faith, not only among the children, but the various generations of their families. A model that was able to provide an experience that has had, I truly believe, a profound and lifelong impact on many of our children.

As I said, certainly we are not all called to be teachers, but as we consider the stewardship of this Parish over the summer, as we consider where our time, talent and treasure might best be used in the coming year, I would encourage you to take a trip downstairs some Sunday morning when fall rolls around or better yet, get to one of the occasional evening events throughout the year – if only to see what is going on with these kids and young adults, who truly are a part of the foundation of this church.

Finally, as Christ revealed himself by saying “I am the bread of life,” he looked forward to the sacrifice that would feed and nourish us all. It is this story, this act that supercedes all the other theological and scriptural arguments and is at the center of all we do downstairs. And unless we continue to provide the space and means for this story to be known, understood, owned, and lived by our children the burden of their nourishment and truly their faith falls on each one of us, individually and alone.

Living Bread

Proper 14B — 10 August 2003

Sarah Conner

Deuteronomy 8:1-10, Psalm 34

Ephesians 4:25-5:2, John 6:37-51

i.

I have a friend from college named Elizabeth, though everyone called her Giz. Giz was a bright, very sensitive, very spiritual young woman. She was also Episcopalian, by the way. In the summer of 1983, a few weeks after graduating from college, Giz was on a subway platform in New York City. There, she was approached by members of a Christian cult. Later that summer, Giz joined the cult, and she remains a member to this day. Not long after she joined the cult, Giz wrote a letter to her family to try to explain why she made this decision. She said that she wanted to live a pure Christian life, and felt that belonging to the cult would let her do that.

Moses said, “This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised to your ancestors...a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing.” Giz truly believed that joining this cult would take her to the promised land. She felt that the cult would allow her to order her life in a way that was pleasing to God. She was ready to diligently observe God’s commandments, and the cult was a way for her to do that. Most of us have our own ideas of how to get to the promised land. These ideas usually involve a list of things we feel we should try diligently to make happen. These are things like exercising, losing weight, getting promoted, praying more, or quitting smoking. If we just could get our act together and do all these things, then we would “eat bread without scarcity and lack nothing.”

These are all good things to do. It’s not that we shouldn’t try to do them. There’s a couple of things on that list that I really ought to go home and start doing this afternoon. But if we aren’t aware of the grace that allows us to do them, our desire to do them becomes a kind of cult.

There’s a reason why we ask God for our daily bread. It’s because that’s where the bread comes from. It doesn’t come from us. Just so, the wherewithal to do the things we hope will make us happy comes only from God. This morning’s collect said it very well: “Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will.....” So even the desire to do those things we think will get us to the promised land is given to us by God. It makes a big difference knowing where your bread comes from.

ii.

About four years ago, Prime Time Live did a segment on cults. It so happened that one of the cults they featured was the cult that Giz had joined. And all of a sudden, there was Giz on my TV screen. The segment included a little bit of footage of her. It was stunning to see her after all those years. What was most surprising was that she looked and seemed exactly the same as she did when I knew her in college. She seemed not to have changed in the least. That might sound comforting, but actually, it was disturbing. Because looking at her, I realized that her life had stopped in 1983. She’s still alive, but she had stopped growing and changing as a person twenty years ago.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever....” For twenty years now, Giz has been eating bread that does not nourish her, bread that will not keep her alive in the long run. And we’ve all done it. We all know what it’s like to eat bread that isn’t good for us, that doesn’t nourish us in the least – and sometimes we eat a lot of it for a long time.

Jesus distinguishes between bread that will not keep you alive and the bread that lets you live forever. The piece of Paul's letter that was read this morning offers some trustworthy ways to discern the difference. If you're so angry that it causes you to sin, if you can't speak truthfully to your neighbors, if you're bitter, if you find your words are hurting others rather than helping them, then maybe you're eating bread that's slowly killing you.

The Spirit of Christ that's in each of us is that living bread Jesus talked about – there really is an inexhaustible supply in each of us. At each Eucharist we're invited to “feed on [Christ] in our hearts by faith...” We can only eat so much at one time, so we've got to put aside the bread that doesn't truly nourish us so that we have room for this living bread. How to do that is the subject of another sermon, but at least when we come to the altar and receive the Body of Christ, we're acting out with our bodies what we're trying to do in our souls.

iii.

Giz's mother still keeps in touch with one of my other friends from college. Recently, my friend told me Giz's mother has learned that many cult members left the cult last summer. It makes me wonder whether the cult is starting to disintegrate, which would not be a surprise – all kinds of groups do over time. “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold...”²

² William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Third Edition* (1975: W.W. Norton & Company, New York): p. 2361.

I hope that Giz finds a way to leave the cult and return to her family. I hope she'd go back to church again. And more than that, I hope she'd find a church like All Saints. The center has held here for more than a hundred years and I know it will hold for a hundred more. This parish feeds a lot of people with living bread. I know what it's like to be fed in this place. And this parish knows where that bread comes from, because the One who gives this bread is profoundly present here. There aren't many places in this world like All Saints. It's worth all you can give it.

Amen.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 14B

Collect: *Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Deuteronomy 8: 1 - 10

1 This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. 2 Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. 3 He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. 4 The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the LORD your God disciplines you. 6 Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. 7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, 9 a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. 10 You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you.

Ephesians 4: 25 - 5: 2

25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for the devil. 28 Thieves must give up stealing;

rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. 29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

John 6: 37 - 51

37 Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; 38 for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day." 41 Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Psalm 34

1 I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth.

2 I will glory in the Lord; let the humble hear and rejoice.

3 Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord; let us exalt his Name together.

4 I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me out of all my terror.

5 Look upon him and be radiant, and let not your faces be ashamed.

6 I called in my affliction and the Lord heard me and saved me from all my troubles.

7 The angel of the Lord encompasses those who fear him, and he will deliver them.

8 Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who trust in him!

9 Fear the Lord, you that are his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.

10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack nothing that is good.

11 Come, children, and listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

12 Who among you loves life and desires long life to enjoy prosperity?

13 Keep your tongue from evil-speaking and your lips from lying words.

14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.

16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.

17 The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them and delivers them from all their troubles.

18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and will save those whose spirits are crushed.

19 Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord will deliver him out of them all.

20 He will keep safe all his bones; not one of them shall be broken.

21 Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be punished.

22 The Lord ransoms the life of his servants, and none will be punished who trust in him.

You Eat a Candy Bar: Explain
Proper 15B — 16/17 August 2003
Leslie K. Sterling

*Proverbs 9:1-6, Psalm 34/147;
Ephesians 5:15-20, John 6:53-59*

There's a famous Harvard story about a class of mostly pre-med students walking into an important biology exam to discover that the entire test consists of the following six words:

“You eat a candy bar. Explain.”

In order to pass this exam, the student was expected to write a general overview of the basic workings of human digestion— what happens to the candy bar in the mouth, in the stomach, in the intestine how the sense of smell interacts with the sense of taste, the breakdown of the candy into sugars, fats, and proteins the flow of nutrients in the bloodstream, how those nutrients affect the muscles, the brain, the liver ending with the liquid and solid excretion of waste from the cellular level on through to the final elimination from the body. It was a brilliant open-ended exam question and it has become a legend among exam questions with good reason. The students who had not studied were left with no place to hide, but the students who were well-prepared also had a problem with the exam. Their problem was often that they knew too much; the question was so broad; they had to set their own boundaries for the answer; and many of the best and brightest students had a difficult time finishing the test in the very limited amount of time provided.

My effort to develop a sermon for today feels an awful lot like.....

“You Eat A Candy Bar: Explain”

I understand exactly what those biology students must have felt. This gospel statement is so deceptively simple; the task of explaining it so incredibly vast. It is hard to even know where to begin. Whole libraries of books have been written about it. I cannot hope to offer an in-depth spiritual/emotional/theological argument in ten minutes. You eat the bread of life: Explain. You eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood: Explain

What does this mean, exactly? How does taking him within us mean that we abide in him? How does this lead to eternal life?

The importance of bread

In the modern world we are used to having a wide variety of foods available. Bread to most of us is a side dish of toast with breakfast; half a pita with a salad; an extra roll with a takeout meal. But back in the first century culture of Jesus and the disciples and even today in many parts of the world, bread is the very basic stuff of life. Poor people and working people lived largely on bread. Most people ate bread every single day, more than once a day. For people who are barely scraping by, bread is the center of the meal, or even the whole meal. Bread is relatively plentiful and relatively inexpensive. Almost everyone could afford to buy bread, or could afford to buy grain to make bread. If you are so poor that you don't even have bread, your very survival is in question. But even if you are desperately poor, if you still have bread, you know you can stay alive for at least one more day. Bread therefore is a very basic symbol of survival.

What does it mean to be fed

So what does it mean to be fed with the bread from heaven? What does it mean to be fed with any meal? You eat a candy bar: explain! God in the magnificence of creation places nutrients in food that are good for us and meant to make us stronger. When we are fed the nutrition in the food passes into us, becomes part of us, strengthens us, revives us. I'm not sure that even the biology majors really understand the miraculous mystery of that. And I know biology majors cannot explain what being well fed does to the heart and mind and spirit. If you've ever been really hungry and then eaten a hunk of really good bread—not air bread, but a nice heavy loaf of well-made, home-made bread—then you know that indescribable feeling of satisfaction of feeling nourished from deep within. That is the kind of gut-level satisfaction Jesus wants for us. He knows we are all really hungry. He wants to satisfy our deepest hunger like a warm loaf of God-made bread. He wants us to be nourished deep within in our encounters with him. He wants us to taste and see that the Lord is good

Body of Christ, Bread of Heaven

This whole section of the Gospel According to John is Jesus' attempt to explain his supernatural identity. John Chapter 6, where today's reading today is found, begins with the famous feeding miracle. A few loaves of barley bread, poor people's food. Those five loaves become enough for 5000. Twelve baskets of broken pieces are gathered up as leftovers. This miracle had such a powerful effect on the population that many more people than usual began crowding around Jesus. Most of them are poor; most of them are always hungry. They are hoping to be fed again with loaves of bread. Oh but Jesus has something even better to give them

When Jesus refers to his body as food and his blood as drink, he is trying to use simple everyday terms to explain to the disciples who he is. He is trying to prepare the disciples for his future sacrifice. Jesus knows that his body will be broken on the cross for the life of the world. And Jesus knows that he will live on in the Eucharist, broken and distributed among the faithful. Though he was only one human body as a man, in his divine self, in his risen body, he is enough for everyone to be fed by him, and still have an abundance left over for all who are in need. Just like the five barley loaves in the feeding of the 5000, those who come to him shall not hunger, because there is always enough of him to go around. Communion with Jesus in body and in spirit is the feast that never ends

This means that the committed Christian relationship with Christ is a very spiritually and physically intimate one. It's goes deeper than just seeing him, deeper than just hearing him talk, standing next to him or being close to him or any other encounter that leaves him safely on the outside of us. But it also goes deeper than just bringing Jesus in on a mental level, more than thinking of him as a good teacher, more than acknowledging he was a charismatic man of great spiritual power, more than repeating the wise things he said and marveling at the supernatural miracles he performed

Jesus wants more than an external, superficial relationship with us. He wants to become one with us in the most complete way possible. When we receive Jesus into our bodies as the bread of heaven and cup of salvation, we receive into ourselves everything that is good and nourishing about Jesus— his oneness with God, his obedience to God, his certainty of the power of good to triumph over evil. We receive inestimable benefits beyond our knowing. It helps us lay aside immaturity, and walk in the way of insight. It helps us to live as wise people in evil days. It empowers us to follow daily in the steps of his most holy life. His holy presence within us means that we also abide in him. What does it mean when Jesus is our Bread of Life? It means he is as real a need for us as the food we eat. It means he sustains us on a daily basis. It means we need him to survive.

You eat a candy bar: explain. Well, my understanding of biology is pretty simple. I can't explain exactly what happens when you eat a candy bar. I would have flunked that famous Nat Sci test. When I hit a wall switch, I can't explain how electricity travels over miles of wires and brings light to the room. [God bless our brothers and sisters in Detroit still suffering the effects of the blackout.] My understanding of theology is pretty simple too. I can't explain exactly what happens when we receive Christ's body and blood. Fortunately relationship with God is not about passing a theological test. Our task is only to believe. We don't need to know how it works. We only need to look at our lives and the lives of people all around us, and recognize all the ways that it does work. We live in a culture of spiritually starved people, stuffing themselves with all kinds of things that can never answer that hunger. They seek the bread that does not satisfy. But we have Jesus Christ, the bread from heaven that gives perfect satisfaction. He is true nourishment for our true hunger. When we take Christ deeply into our bodies, our hearts, our souls, he is the answer to everything we hunger for. We lack nothing that is good and we receive the most precious gift of all: we receive eternal life.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 15B

Collect: *Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of this redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Proverbs 9: 1 - 6

1 Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. 2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. 3 She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, 4 "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says, 5 "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

Ephesians 5: 15 - 20

15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, 20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 6: 53 - 59

53 So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 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." 59 He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

Psalm 147

1 Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God! how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!
2 The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel.
3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
4 He counts the number of the stars and calls them all by their names.
5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; there is no limit to his wisdom.
6 The Lord lifts up the lowly, but casts the wicked to the ground.
7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our God upon the harp.
8 He covers the heavens with clouds and prepares rain for the earth;

9 He makes grass to grow upon the mountains and green plants to serve mankind.

10 He provides food for flocks and herds and for the young ravens when they cry.

11 He is not impressed by the might of a horse; he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

12 But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him, in those who await his gracious favor.

13 Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion;

14 For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; he has blessed your children within you.

15 He has established peace on your borders; he satisfies you with the finest wheat.

16 He sends out his command to the earth, and his word runs very swiftly.

17 He gives snow like wool; he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.

18 He scatters his hail like bread crumbs; who can stand against his cold?

19 He sends forth his word and melts them; he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.

20 He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and his judgments to Israel.

21 He has not done so to any other nation; to them he has not revealed his judgments. Hallelujah!

God is in the Small Stuff (and it all matters)

Solemnization of the Marriage of Ann Webb and Charles Stuart

23 August 2003

Song of Solomon 8:6-7; I Corinthians 13; John 15:9-16

Leslie K. Sterling

This is a glorious day, a day filled with thanksgiving and delight. The spirit of God is moving joyfully in this place as we celebrate the blessing of a match made in heaven — the marriage of Ann Webb and Charles Stuart

Some of you know a book called: Don't sweat the small stuff! It was a best seller some years ago. Mostly it said—don't waste time worrying about the little things in life. Just figure out which big things deserve your attention, and put all your time and effort there. Well, that book is wrong. Not only is the small stuff important, it is more important than the big stuff. You've heard it said--take care of the pennies, and the dollars will take care of themselves. Take care of the small stuff, and the big stuff will take care of itself. Take care of small problems, and they never become big ones. The small stuff is more important than the big stuff

So there is another book I like much better. It's called: God is in the Small Stuff, and it all matters. So this my message for you today. Always remember that God in the small stuff. Always look for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the day to day tasks, the routine activities of your new life together. When you look for God, you will always find God and God will permeate even the most ordinary moments, with holiness, and purpose, and love

Ann, when you are in the middle of some ordinary daily task, surround yourself with this prayer thought — “I dedicate this moment as a tangible demonstration before God that I love my husband and my marriage is important.” Then you are bringing God into the small stuff. Charles will feel it; he will know it; it will call down a fresh anointing of your love that will shine in you and surround the both of you.

Charles, when you are in the middle of some routine daily chore, surround yourself with this prayer thought — “I dedicate this moment as a tangible demonstration before God that I love my wife and my marriage is important.” Then you are bringing God into the small stuff. Ann will feel it; she will know it; it will call down a fresh anointing of your love that will shine in you and surround the both of you.

Your desire to give yourselves to one another in marriage was inspired by the Holy Spirit. God has brought you together for holy purposes, to show all those around you that love is possible in this world. And Christ will sustain your love by being present with you, in big emotional ways, in mountaintop spiritual ways, and also in small practical ways, in the daily bread ways that feed a relationship--nourish it, and sustain it. And all you have to do is be aware of it, and give thanks for it. God's presence in those moments that look like small stuff are really the drop-after-drop of glue that, over time, strengthen the bonds of marriage, keep love alive and enable you to face any challenges life may send you, moment by moment, day by day and year by year.

You are about to exchange solemn vows. You are about to make sacred promises to one another, before God, and witnessed by all these people who care for you. There is a duality to wedding vows. You promise to share sadness and joy, bad times and good. You promise to walk hand in hand over rough roads and smooth. So I'd like to add one thing: Promise to find God in the small stuff and the big stuff. Make your vows more than words by keeping the love behind those vows alive in even your smallest actions. Know what it is that makes him/her feel cherished. Take time to demonstrate your love every day. Recognize that God has blessed you greatly. Take time to give thanks for your love every day, even when there is frustration or disagreement. (The biggest arguments can start over the small stuff!) Find God there, too, even in the midst of conflict, showing you an answer that will not only keep you together, but make your marriage stronger in the process. Take delight in each other, every day, and you will feel the ever-renewing joy of God's delight in you

This big event—this wedding—is made up of a lot of small details. If enough of the small details go well, they come together to create a great celebration. Marriage is built on day to day details too, the ones that go as planned and the ones that don't, the joyful moments and the sorrowful moments, the easy decisions and challenging turning points. When you put all these moments together, and God is in the midst of them, then you have a relationship so strong that nothing can shake it. Then you have a love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Keep God in the small stuff, and the big picture will take care of itself, blessing you with a glorious marriage, and an everlasting love.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7

6 Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned.

1 Corinthians 13

1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but

do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

John 15:9-16

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

Transforming Reminders to Re-Membering

Proper 17B — 31 August 2003

Sue Singer

Deuteronomy 4: 1-9, Psalm 15

Ephesians 6: 10-20, Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

This is the time of year, in my life at least, when lists rule. Course choices, required texts, assignment dates, questions for my advisor, all the outer and inner paraphernalia of the start of another school year. Those of you with children, especially children who are changing schools, or those of you who are in school yourselves, probably have similar collections of small pieces of paper stuffed into your daytimers. (That is, unless you're technologically adept and have it all on your electronic organizer instead!) And even those of you whose lives aren't shaped by the school-year calendar might have succumbed to the sense of "new beginnings" in the air at this time of year. Maybe you have your collection of lists too – I really must, I wish I could, very soon I will, I can't put it off

Part of me loves lists – the security of knowing it's all written down, the virtuous feeling of checking off the items, and especially the satisfaction that at least I won't forget anything (unless the unthinkable happens and I lose the lists!). And part of me just hates them – hates having a myriad of unrelated tasks hanging over me, hates having my schedule measured out by things to do, but above all hates the awareness that items on a list, even when they are all successfully checked off, don't begin to get to the heart of what my life is about or who I am. I think that lists are great servants but completely inadequate masters; they help to define the parts but don't come anywhere near capturing the whole; they are undoubtedly useful but rarely life-giving.

Trying to reduce what our lives are most truly about to lists is soul-destroying. In the struggle to remember everything we become fragmented and dis-membered ourselves, we forget who we are in the frenzy of doing. We know this most clearly when suddenly a crisis interrupts our carefully scripted and listed lives:

a sudden illness, a death, falling in love, an overwhelming piece of good or bad fortune. And all our lists flutter to the ground, forgotten, as we confront something much, much bigger at the core of our being, something that has always been there but that we have managed to paper over and forget.

The Scriptures we have heard today address those deepest of human questions: the questions of what our lives are truly about and what we should do to be fully human – in right relationship with God, with other people and with our selves – how we are to be whole persons, of integrity.

"Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle? Who may abide upon your holy hill?" asks the Psalmist. How do we live most fully with God? How do we live most fully with others? How do we live most fully with and within ourselves? How do we do that?

In the reading from Deuteronomy the people of Israel are about to go into the Promised Land. They must be champing at the bit with expectation – finally they get to be a people with their own land, after years of wandering. What must they do in order to flourish in that land, truly to live as God's people? The Ephesians are struggling to live a Christian life under threatening and challenging circumstances, and Paul is helping them reflect on the things that will help them do this.

And in all of these Scriptures we are presented with lists. Lists in the Psalm of the qualities of the righteous person "who will never be overthrown." Injunctions by Moses to remember and teach every single one of the commandments God has given. A catalogue from Paul of the "whole armor of God" which will enable embattled Christians to "stand firm."

Now, these are very helpful lists in themselves, and of course there's much more to what these Scriptures are offering than simply lists. The Psalmist is concerned that the truth and justice required for a blameless life come from the heart. Moses' insistence that the Israelites "give heed," "watch yourselves," and be diligent is less for the sake of being right than it is to recall

the people to their covenant relationship with the God who is like no other God, who has saved them. Paul's inspiring metaphor of the armor of God is rooted in an inward relationship with God through the life of prayer.

But there's still something that makes my heart sink a little when the life of faith is reduced in any way to the fulfillment of a list of requirements. What if I lose the list? What if I forget something on it? What if I have the wrong list? What if someone else insists that their list is better? What if something comes up that isn't covered by my list? But above all, and more seriously, how can I even begin to have a living relationship with a living God if all I'm doing is struggling to remember and follow a list of rules?

Jesus had something to say about rule-based religion in today's Gospel. His disciples had not been paying attention to all the rules on the ritual purity list – notably, they had failed to check off the “wash hands before eating anything” rule. In his response to the justified criticism of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus doesn't simply ridicule or discount their lists – they are, after all, God-given commandments, parts of the list that Moses was talking about in our first reading.

Jesus moves the discussion to a deeper and much more difficult level. He goes behind the process of checking off observances to look at what is really going on in the human heart, to scrutinize the wellspring of our relationship with God and with other people and with ourselves. He points out what happens when the “commandments of God” get put on a list by humans: they tend to become things that are spoken with the lips, checked off as duties, “human precepts” under human control, and they are not allowed to do their real work of transforming the human heart.

And then Jesus produces his own list of the consequences of this list-based religion: a scary list of evil intentions, all the things that divide us and numb us and fragment us, the things that make it impossible for us even to know what our lives are really about, let alone to live that way.

Faith that transforms our lives is not about remembering innumerable items on a list of righteous actions. Still less is it about performing religious duties in an external manner. Transforming faith involves letting God get in behind all our lists, setting aside all the things we have to remember and letting God re-member us – literally put us back together – letting God touch our hearts so that our actions are transformed from within.

How should we do this? Jesus only gave us one commandment about a ritual observance. He said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” when he took bread and blessed and broke it. If we do that, our action is united with God's initiative for our transformation from within. When we eat and drink at this table we are united with Christ in our physical and emotional and spiritual beings, re-membered into our true identity as God's beloved children, members of the Body of God's Son our Lord. As we act in remembrance of Christ, Christ re-members us, he transforms us into members of his body and members of each other, by means of the shared bread and cup.

When Saint Augustine talked about the Eucharist's power to answer the deepest questions about who we truly are and how we should most fully live, he said that in it: “We behold who we are, may we become one with the One we receive.” And so we become Christ's body in the world, taken, blessed and broken by God, as we eat and drink Christ's Body and Blood at this altar, taken, blessed and broken by God for the world.

And then we go out, out into a world whose needs are so great and whose wounds are so shockingly bleeding that lists and duties and prohibitions flutter to the ground, useless and forgotten. The only thing that can possibly help is people with transformed hearts, and that is who God enables us to be.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 17B

Collect: *Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Deuteronomy 4: 1 - 9

1 So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. 2 You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you. 3 You have seen for yourselves what the LORD did with regard to the Ba'al of Pe'or--how the LORD your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Ba'al of Pe'or, 4 while those of you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today. 5 See, just as the LORD my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. 6 You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" 7 For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him? 8 And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? 9 But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children--

Ephesians 6: 10 - 20

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Mark 7: 1 - 23

1 Now when the Phar'isees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3 (For the Phar'isees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles. 5 So the Phar'isees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" 6 He said to them, "Isai'ah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7 in vain do

they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' 8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." 9 Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! 10 For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother' and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' 11 But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban (that is, an offering to God) — 12 then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, 13 thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed one. And you do many things like this." 14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. 16 Let anyone with ears to hear listen." 17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, 19 since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. 21 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22 adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Psalm 15

- 1 Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle?
who may abide upon your holy hill?
- 2 Whoever leads a blameless life and does what is right,
who speaks the truth from his heart.
- 3 There is no guile upon his tongue; he does no evil to his friend;
he does not heap contempt upon his neighbor.
- 4 In his sight the wicked is rejected,
but he honors those who fear the Lord.
- 5 He has sworn to do no wrong
and does not take back his word.
- 6 He does not give his money in hope of gain,
nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.
- 7 Whoever does these things shall never be overthrown.

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