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*Deuteronomy 26:1-11*  
*John 6:24-35*

Happy Thanksgiving! With this week, we have officially entered the holiday season. It's a time of celebration and joy, spent with family and friends. It's a time of giving thanks to God and giving to others out of our faith. Even with these warm, glowing moments, we are in an anxious season. It's a time of renewed mourning, for those who continue to mourn deceased loved ones. It's a time of additional financial stress, and often disappointment facing our hopes of what we thought life would be like.

In our house, we have welcomed a close friend to celebrate Thanksgiving with us. For me, this always makes me more anxious. In addition to all the fun, extra celebrations of the church, we're trying to be hospitable at home. My head gets absorbed with accommodating another adult body in our relatively small place; with anticipating and providing for the various needs of our guest; and trying to make special festivities and meals go as smoothly as possible. My husband and I often gripe and grumble a bit more at one another unfortunately.

All of this is on top of the increased anxiety level of our lives, which seems to be everywhere. The media continues reports on our economy – Are we in a recession or not? When will it end? How much has the market tanked? What is our unemployment rate this week?

We hear stories of aggression and violence from around the world, around North Korea or Afghanistan. In the States, we continue to be on “orange alert” for

terrorist activity, still growing from our horrific experience nine years ago. Even as we are anxious about these things, we have cause for concern. People are worried (perhaps with good reason) about the perils of traveling by airplane. They protest both the new full body scans and the too-close-for-comfort pat-downs.

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We are an anxious people. I suspect that this is nothing new. We humans have been anxious for a while. You can just hear it in the backdrop of our gospel story today. The crowd of 5,000 that came to Jesus in our lesson had just been miraculously fed “on the other side of the sea.” (6:22) Hear again Jesus’ response to their question: “[Y]ou are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” (6:26) I hear those words with a tinge of cynicism in my head.

Jesus claimed that the people followed him, not because they saw God in him, but because their needs were met. They sought him to learn how to take care of any future problems. It’s just like that wise saying: “Give a man a fish, he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime.” That’s what they were thinking. They wanted to know how he did this miraculous thing, and how they could do it, too. The people wanted to be saved from anxiety and stress of life.

Perhaps especially at the holidays, we all know that if you are hungry, you need food. If you are without a job, you need work. If you are sick, you need healing. If you feel threatened, you need to be assured of safety. Regardless of our incomes or work status, there are times in all our lives when we want to know that we can get what we want or desperately need. We crave certainty and control. We want to know that “If I do this thing, then I will always have what I want.”

But life is not that way at all, is it? Accident and illness strike, sometimes regardless of any care taken or preparations made. Companies may need to lay faithful employees off even after years of service. The wrong turn of events and temptations may bring us face to face with our own demons like addiction. Whatever our age, we may be alive one day and not the next. We buy insurance to help us with the ups and downs, but there are no real guarantees for what will happen in our lives.



Even so, the people wanted to be like Jesus – to be able to do what he did. They asked him how they could perform the works of God. Just as Jesus often did, he flipped their question on its head. “The works of God?” – Jesus could have easily repeated. No, you mean the work of God. That’s something else entirely. It’s something that we receive – we behold Jesus’ witness and believe. We respond to the gift given to us by offering another gift we have received – our faith and trust. It’s not something we could ever do.

So that wasn’t the answer they expected, but they tried again. Perhaps they could not work for what they wanted. But they could continue to ask for a guarantee, for certainty. Show us a sign that makes it clear why we should believe in you, Jesus. (6:30) Or “give us this bread always.” (6:34) We all want our guarantees, promising us a secure future. We want to know that the things and people around us will be all be well. But Jesus would not be pinned down in these ways. He refused to guarantee that the people could have control over these aspects of their lives.

Instead he made a much more outrageous promise. Jesus shifted their focus from the causes of their anxiety. It’s not really the bread that matters, right? They –

and we – have a hunger that’s far deeper: a desire to be more connected to God. We long to entrust that their souls may be fed by their creator, that the ups and downs of life will be redeemed by the only one who can.

In the face of all life’s uncertainties, it is Jesus, himself, whom we need. In the word, and in this meal, we encounter God who became one of us, that our lives might be renewed and made whole again. Even now, we long for living bread. It transforms anxious worriers, focused on our own welfare – into members of the body of Christ, living to witness in his name. Even now, we seek living wine that washes us, again and again, in the forgiveness won through Christ’s blood.

Perhaps we all know this, but it’s so easy to forget. The certainty we seek is our knowledge – or trust – that we are loved and held, enlivened and guided by our steadfast, loving God. When Christ’s Spirit reminds of this – this today, on Sundays, and any day – we are invited:

- To draw closer to God;
- To gather around the table with our church family, our neighbors, and new friends who we just met; and
- To be fed again by the one who sets us free to live and serve, in Christ’s name.

Thanks be to God.