

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

August 2, 2015

Proper 13B/Ordinary 18B/Pentecost 10

The readings this week:

◦ 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a ◦ Psalm 51:1-12

◦ Ephesians 4:1-16 ◦ John 6:24-35



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Hit Me, A Reflection on John 6:24-35

So...I think to fully understand the "I am the bread of life" text, we need to go back a few chapters in John. In chapter four, Jesus is talking to the woman at the well. Jesus offers her water, she marvels at his lack of a bucket with which to draw water, and he then says (in effect) that he's not talking about the water in the well. If she drank that water she'd just get thirsty again. *But, who ever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*

Then comes the best part. Probably a little flummoxed, the woman responds: Sir, give me this water.

It's clear that the woman thinks that he's just going to grab a bucket and find this nifty well...so that she "will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." But, to the reader, we know that the water Jesus is talking about can't be drawn from any well on earth. It's a gift from above, a gift from God.

Now, fast forward two chapters. Jesus had just fed a whole lot of people on top of a mountain, with just a few fish and some loaves of bread. Needless to say, these people were impressed. They follow him as he travels around, and he tells them point-blank that the only reason they're tagging along is because they ate their fill. They know where their bread is buttered. (Or something like that.)

He tells them that they shouldn't worry about that bread—the bread from the mountaintop—because that bread will get moldy and rot away. But, they are to labor for the bread that doesn't perish.

The people get all theological on Jesus, and remind Jesus of the manna in the wilderness that Moses gave them—the bread from heaven.

Jesus corrects them. That wasn't Moses. Moses couldn't do anything like that on his own. That was God's bread. Jesus goes on: *My father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*

Then comes the best part. Probably a little flummoxed, they respond: Sir, give us this bread always.

It's clear that the crowd is still thinking about a loaf of bread. Maybe Challah. Maybe Wonder. Maybe Pepperidge Farm Cinnamon Swirl. (My fav.) Who knows. But, to us, the readers, who know this passage so well, we know that this is not the case.

Because Jesus explicitly tells us that he is the bread of life.

I think there is something to the similarity of these two texts from John. John's Gospel was written nearly seventy years after the death and resurrection of Jesus—a time when baptism and Eucharist had been fully established in the spiritual lives of Christians.

These two passages talk of ordinary everyday items like bread and water, and yet they point people to realities that are far beyond the ordinary. Big things are going on, even if you can't always see them. God can give water and bread that can be the very seeds of eternal life. God can cause wells to spring up, gushing into eternity.

Simple things can be signs of things too great to even fully understand.

And, I think these two passages are prompts for prayer. For the catechumens—the ones awaiting baptism, and who were deep in preparation for what would happen in the sacred waters—they were called by the woman at the well to pray: Sir, Lord, give me this water! It's a prayer of yearning and longing. A prayer that knows who can give it, and what the stakes are when it's given.

And for the community of the baptized—to those who already have the well gushing up within them, those already washed in the waters...well, we are to pray for something else.

Sir—Lord—give us this bread. Always.

Because it's from God. Because it will never perish, even though it may die.

Because, Jesus is this bread. The Bread of Life.

Rick Morley, @
[garden path](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a](#)

What other people does David draw into the wake of his sin? From this chapter, how would you explain what led "a man after God's own heart" to commit adultery and murder? At what point does a temptation become sin? Why are we tempted to cover up our sins rather than confess them? How do you tend to respond when someone confronts you about something you know you've done wrong? Why do you think Nathan tells David a story rather than confronting him directly about his sin? Why is the Lord amazed that David despised both him and his word? How is God's justice and mercy revealed in his decision about David's sin? The author of Hebrews writes: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11). In what ways has God's painful discipline had that effect in your life? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#), [InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 51:1-12](#)

As Christians, we know we are sinful. Why then is it so painful to be confronted with a specific sin? What sin have you been avoiding talking to God about? Take it to God and experience his forgiveness. List the different synonyms for sin in David's prayer. What is God asked to do about sin? (Count and name the verbs.) Verse 10 is the center sentence. How does it center the prayer? Psalm 51 makes us aware of how sinful we are, and it makes us less actively sinful. How do you see it working that way in you? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#), [InterVarsity Press](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

Dear God, I sometimes don't know what I am hungry for. Sometimes I think I need bread when what I really need is simply... You. I give thanks for the life of Jesus and his ministry, because he points to all the ways in which I may realize how satisfying a life lived in and with God's presence in. Jesus life reminds me that Your Grace, O God, is always available to me. All I have to do is to ask you, and like the Jews in the wilderness, you shall provide for me. Thank you, Precious Lord, for the many ways you continue to feed me and to sustain me. Amen.

[Unitarian Christian Fellowship](#)

*Everybody needs a place to rest
Everybody wants to have a home
Don't make no difference what nobody says
Aint nobody like to be alone
Everybodys got a hungry heart...
- Bruce Springsteen*

Like crumbs in the fairy tale woods
when the trail goes dead and misty
and our eyes grow owl wide with fear
you drop flakes of guidance
you conjure loaves of mercy surprising
and keep us on the wandering wayfarer way.
It is our hungry hearts
that growl and groan and writhe,
lonely and starving for you,
our companion, our bread breaker,
and this, your manna flakes fine, ethereal,
your quail, meaty, succulent,
and words of assured presence walking aside
is the food our famished souls
cried out to you for
and our full stomachs knew
and chanted up to our thickening heads:
yes, indeed, here too is the holy.

- Michael Coffey, [Ocotillo Pub](#)

3rd Reading: [Ephesians 4:1-16](#)

What are the characteristics of a life that is worthy of our calling? Paul says we have one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all. How do these seven "ones" contribute to actually living out true unity? In verses 8-10 Christ is compared to a conquering hero whose victory parade fills "the whole universe," from the highest heaven to the lowest earth. He then generously distributes gifts (the spoils of victory) to his loyal followers. What is the nature and purpose of these gifts? How does spiritual infancy differ from spiritual maturity? What spiritual gifts do you think you might have? How do they fulfill the purposes described in verses 11-13? In verse 16 Paul says that the body "grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." What steps must you take to more fully work toward this goal? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#), [InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: [John 6:24-35](#)

The people reminded Jesus about the manna in Moses' time and asked if he had a sign like that. What lesson did Jesus teach in answer? "Our ancestors ate manna in the desert." What is the food that you need for your life's journey? Why do you think Jesus comes to us as bread or even as food? Would you have found that idea "hard to endure" if you were one of his disciples? [Anne M. Osdieck](#)