

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B, Proper 15  
The Reverend D.S. Mote, PhD  
St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL  
August 15, 2021  
Proverbs 9:1-6  
Psalm 34:9-14  
Ephesians 5:15-20  
John 6:51-58

## Bread for Today

In 2019 I spent Holy Week in the Diocese of Cuba for the first time. I have visited there in the diocese nearest to us many times over many years and in many liturgical seasons, but two years ago I spent Holy Week among six different parishes and missions in the province of Matanzas.

Throughout that Holy Week, as in the several previous weeks, there was no bread. The bakeries had no flour, and so there was no bread being baked.

If you are familiar with Cuban bread, the white, crusty baguettes that are the preferred *pan cubano*, you may have a sense of how important bread, daily bread, is in the Cuban diet.

There was no bread. There were crackers that people were eating as a substitute. Some mornings we spread butter on them and pretended. But there was no bread.

Given the absence of bread and the scarcity of other foodstuffs, the Good Friday fast was, in a certain way, imposed upon nearly everyone, including not only all kinds of Christians but also all those who don't identify as Christian.

Late on Good Friday afternoon, after a day of fasting that included a climb up a steep hillside for the stations of the cross that morning as well as the 3:00 PM Good Friday liturgy at St John the Evangelist (San Juan Evangelista) parish in Coliseo, my dear friend Gilberto, rector in Coliseo, his spouse Mari, Mari's sister, and I began our drive back to Matanzas City.

Just a few blocks from the church after we had turned onto the main road, we saw a line at a bakery on the left side of the road.

We pulled over, and Gilberto went to the service window. Yes, they were just about to pull some loaves out of the ovens. He purchased as many as they would sell him.

Gilberto returned to the car with baguettes in a bag, still warm and wonderful-smelling right out of the ovens. He took one of the loaves and broke off four big hunks, one for each of us, and distributed them to us.

And as he did so, the words of administration were these: *Today is all we have. And today we have bread.* We delighted in that warm bread. We ate and were satisfied.

It was good bread, and it did us good. We were enormously thankful for it and enjoyed it greatly.

We drove back to Matanzas City and dropped Mari's sister off at her home. We went back to the seminary campus where Gilberto, a seminary professor as well as a rector, and his family live and where I was staying as usual.

A few hours later Gilberto, Mari, and I concluded our long Good Friday with a late supper of more of that bread, toasted with butter, and hot chocolate. It was one of the finest meals I have ever enjoyed. The food was tasty, and though we were fairly well exhausted, the company warm and sweet.

Most of us have more than enough bread and other foods not only for today but for the foreseeable future, including enough to tide us over in the event of tropical storms or depressions or hurricanes yet to come. Still, the wisdom of Padre Gilberto's words rings true: *Today is all we have. And today we have bread.*

Today is all we ever have. We are not promised tomorrow.

In the present reality of the living God, past, present, and future are held together in the eternal now. In this eternal now, the living bread is continually coming down from heaven to feed us spiritually and emotionally and mentally as well as physically.

As we explored last week, when we grasp this reality our awareness expands, and we are raised to a different level of consciousness. Jesus the Christ, sent from God the I AM, will raise us up this very day to this level of understanding, if we are able to receive this good news.

There is a great deal of wisdom in Padre Gilberto's words. Wisdom about literal bread, yes, and wisdom about metaphorical bread as well.

And as we continue through these five Sundays in John's gospel and their focus on bread—this is Sunday four of five of this “bread season in Year B”—today's readings have wisdom as their common theme.

The first reading is from Proverbs 9, from a discourse begun in the previous chapter where Divine Wisdom identifies herself as female and spells out the behaviors that lead humans to acquire wisdom under her tutelage. In Proverbs 8, Wisdom declares that she was present with God at creation and was the master worker through whom God created.

So, in the prologue of John's gospel where we encounter, “In the beginning was the Word,” we could just as easily find, “In the beginning was Sophia, which is the Greek for Wisdom.” Jesus the Christ is both the living Word and the living Wisdom of God.

And in today's reading from Proverbs 9, Sophia's message is about wisdom and bread, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed." Then, "Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

Maturity. Insight. Christian maturity. Wisdom. Growing up into our full personhood in Christ. This is something to which we are all called.

And the reading from the epistle to the Ephesians is also resonant with calls to become wise, to live from and with Holy Wisdom.

This letter is written to those Jesus followers in the city of Ephesus doing a new thing: gathering around a common table regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, previous religious background, occupation, or pedigree.

The epistle admonishes them in our reading today to be careful how they live, not as as unwise people but as wise ones, making the most of the time. The epistle writer is encouraging them to discern God's will for them and not to squander their lives and their precious time in pursuit of excess but rather to find purpose and to express joy and thanksgiving as they are filled with the Spirit—the Spirit of Wisdom—with songs and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to God in their hearts, giving thanks to God at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is not a teaching that says to always be striving for things that are far off in the future. No, Ephesians presents a teaching that we should embrace what is available in the present, realizing that sometimes the greatest gifts are hidden in plain sight.

Many monastics, including many wise monks and nuns of the twentieth century, have encouraged the same. One of the foremost among these was Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani near Bardstown, Kentucky. Merton wrote about *The Hidden Wholeness*: the full reality of the divine in this world and in our lives, ever present yet often uncomprehended—and impossible to comprehend with a literal mind or an inattentive or out-of-touch heart.

Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest and scholar, wrote about our vocation as Christ followers and the vocation of each of us. In his book *Bread for the World*, he wrote,

*It is very important to realize that our vocation  
Is hidden in where we are and who we are.  
We are unique human beings,  
Each with a call to realize in life what nobody else can,  
And to realize it in the concrete context of the here and now.  
We will never find our vocations by trying*

*To figure out whether we are better or worse than others.  
We are good enough to do what we are called to do.  
Be yourself!*

Have you ever heard a greater wisdom than this: be who you are rather than who you are not. And, similarly, this corollary wisdom: receive others for who they are rather than being chronically angry or disappointed that they are not someone else.

I think Henri Nouwen's wisdom about how our individual vocations are buried within, incorporated into where and who we are also obtains for congregations.

St Paul's, Key West has a call that is distinctive to us, a call that we have the gifting and the resources to live out, a call that we must discover in the concrete context of the here and now in Key West.

This is the crucially important process of discernment in which we are now engaged as the community, the congregation of St Paul's.

In our concrete context of the here and now, with the hard reset of the COVID-19 pandemic, what do we need to let go of and what do we need to take up?

What invitations are you hearing in and from the wider community? What ideas return to you often, first thing in the morning, last thing before sleeping? What ideas about love and service to and with and for the wider community make your heart sing?

What is our work? How should we allocate our resources in the service of others? May God guide our ongoing explorations and give us wisdom in each and every decision.

Wisdom is present in these movements of the Spirit. Will we be brave and adventurous enough, that is, enough like Jesus, to listen and to follow?