

Sunday August 5, 2018
Year B: 11th Sunday After Pentecost
John 6:24-35
“Sacramental Wonder”
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John 6:24-35 NRSV

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” 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. 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.” Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” 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? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” 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. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

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.

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church with its relatively lengthy list of seven recognized sacraments, the United Church celebrates only two; the rituals of Baptism and Communion. What a rare and special occurrence, for us to share them both in one day!

Now, some may wonder why we bother, with these ritualized re-enactments of ancient traditions.

What is their meaning, and do they serve a necessary purpose?

Well the truth is of course, that there is nothing particularly special about either this water in our baptismal font – or this unremarkable loaf of bread on our communion table. They are both simple items – without any magic properties.

They are things we encounter and use in our own homes, pretty well every day.

So what makes them special and why do we give them place of privilege in our religious practice?

Well, as citizens of the 21st century – we’re actually not that different from the folks flocking after Jesus some 2000 years ago –

When it comes to God, it seems we all want something tangible.

“Show us a sign!” we plead.

Something physical, that we can put our hands on.

We long to grasp onto, what is essentially something completely un-grasp-able –

We have a deep and innate yearning for, the ethereal 'Word' to be made flesh.

But how does one pin down, Holy Mystery?
How do we dare try to capture an effusive Spirit?
How do we even attempt to contain expansiveness?

We might as well ask, how do we nail Jello to a tree!

So then, in order to satisfy our very human longing for visible, touchable signs, we imbue everyday objects like bread and juice and water with symbolic meaning, and we create symbolic actions like Baptism and Communion –
.....to help us to understand and remember and experience, something indescribably holy, and inexpressibly significant, and powerful, and intense and yet completely indefinable.

"Give us a sign!" the crowd urges Jesus – "Give us a miracle – like the way our ancestors got fed manna in the wilderness"

Show us the goods – lay down the facts. Prove it!

Well where God is concerned, it ain't gonna happen.

We can no more demand proof of God, than nail Jello to a tree!

But what we **can** do, is gather round the font, and share around the communion table – and re-enact the rituals of our faith tradition that have been passed down through the generations – and perhaps if we pay close enough attention – we might notice the way we suddenly feel responsible for the future wellbeing of child we have just baptized;

.....or we might become aware of the way in which we feel suddenly connected when we pass the cup or loaf to a stranger. And in some remarkable way, we might be suddenly fulfilled in a way that has nothing to do with physical hunger - but has to do with feeling part of a community – feeling like we belong, to something larger than ourselves.

As modern, intelligent people, born and raised in an era of scientific proof and factual data, it's easy to question the need for sacraments, for religion, for that matter, even for God.

But as faithful seekers (now joined in our ranks by young Edward!) we continue to wrestle with our search for truth and meaning, taking comfort where we can with these imperfect, yet important physical signs, as we learn to embrace the sacred – leaving space for Mystery and unknowing - and come to accept that perhaps some things simply need to be experienced, rather than understood.

Things like unbridled joy...undeserved forgivenessunconditional love....

Things like unwavering trust....unexpected gratitudeunfounded hope....

Things like.... unknowable faith...and unexplainable sacraments!

For all these inexplicable, yet life giving yet mysteries, let us respond with wonder and thanksgiving!

Amen.