

Yr. B, Proper 13
August 5, 2018
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1435 Words

Lessons: Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15
Psalm 78:23-29
Ephesians 4:1-16
John 6:24-35

The smell of fresh, ripe peaches is the *second*-best sensation of summer. If you stand deep inside a packing shed, you can inhale this beauty. Take a break from swatting the gnats, and you can run your hand across the gentle fuzz of red, golden, yellow and press gently to test the ripeness. The best sensation, of course, is tasting the 'Queen of fruits.' I've watched many people forfeit their manners right there at the cash register, biting into a giant peach...mouth dripping...laughing...not caring.

How is this little miracle of God possible? How can such an ugly little tree produce so much abundant, delectable fruit? We had a peach tree in my back yard when I was growing up. My friends and I would climb up in there and pick peaches. We would sit under that tree and eat until our hands and faces were smeared with stickiness. *All children* should have at least one experience of the relentless fecundity of nature...of God-given abundance, wild and free, and accessible to all!

This is the story of Israel we heard this morning. The children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron because were hungry and afraid. They resented being saved from slavery only to find scarcity in the desert. You and I would complain, too. I've walked in that desert. I've seen what scarcity looks like. In the Palestinian wilderness, it is not hard to imagine what hunger and thirst look like...then or now. In that Middle Eastern desert, it is not hard to imagine what fear and desperation look like...then or now.

And so the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven...each day. Tell the Children of Israel to draw near to me, for I have heard their complaining!" Thus began a miraculous day of transformation from scarcity to abundance. *All children* should have just such an experience of God-given abundance, wild and free, and accessible to all!

The Psalmist was so impressed that he wrote a song about it! "The Lord opened the doors of heaven," the poet sang out. "He rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them grain from heaven. So mortals ate the bread of angels; God provided for them food enough. The Lord rained down flesh upon them like dust, and winged birds like the sand of the sea."

It sounds grotesque to our ears, because we have eaten our fill. Yet, for the hungry, this Psalm is poetry. This story is beautiful. This answer to prayer is full of hope and promise—God-given abundance, wild and free, and accessible to all. This should be *our* prayer to the end of ages because it is the *essence* of God's will being done, and God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

As much as I loved that peach tree in my back yard, I loved going to the packing shed down in Kline even more! Pat's peaches were even more delicious than our peaches. Pat had a vast orchard as far as you could see across the flat, sandy soil between Barnwell and Allendale.

There was one place where the road rose up about thirty feet to a bridge crossing over a railroad track. From the bridge you could see all the spindly, grey death of winter...and all the ripe, fruitful abundance of summer in that orchard. Scarcity and abundance in the very same place.

Just a few more miles down highway 278 was the roadside stand. The hum of conveyor belts echoed from the packing shed out back. Forklifts hauled up pallets filled with boxes onto semi-truck trailers. Neighbors and friends gathered under the giant shade tree to pick out the perfect basket of peaches. We saw, smelled, touched and tasted that sweet abundance together. The clerk kept a roll of paper towels next to the cash register. She gave those out *for free* to the most satisfied and sticky customers in the whole wide world.

Have you ever stopped to think about what Jesus gave out to the thousands of people who gathered on that grassy hill beside the Sea of Galilee? Of course he gave out bread and fish. Like God had done in the desert, Jesus gave the people what they craved. Yet, he gave them much more than food. He gave them a vision of what God's Kingdom looks like. Jesus gave the people a vision of God's will being done and God's kingdom come. It looks like fruitful abundance, wild and free, and accessible to all! The people caught the vision. They tried to forcibly make Jesus their king.

Today's Gospel story begins with *these same people*, searching for Jesus. He had run away. He literally hid from them by sneaking away in a boat the night before. Jesus was not called to be their king. He was called to be *more* than that. Jesus was not called to *give* the bread. He was called to *be* the bread. Jesus is the One through whom we can taste and see that the Lord is good! In other words, he is the bread of our life.

He also does not act alone. *Only* with the help of a little boy, did Jesus transform scarcity into abundance. The *first* miracle on that grassy hillside was that the child trusted Jesus with all the food he had. That child is an example for us! He's the one who gave the generous gift that Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave to everyone. It was not just supper, it was a sign of God-given abundance, wild and free, and accessible to all.

When we gather here to worship, it is not a magic act we are called to believe. It is a transformation we are called to *experience*. The Holy Eucharist is our reminder that God's will is that "the bread which comes down from heaven is intended to give life to the (whole wide) world." God's will is for us to be nourished by the Bread of Life, and *also to share* this Bread of Life. God's will is for us to discover, savor, and share the fruitful abundance, wild and free, that we have experienced in Christ.

"What must we do?" you ask, like the people in today's Gospel story asked. "What must we do to perform the works of God?" St. Paul gives us an answer that is simple and direct: "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 (God's) Spirit in the bond of peace."

According to St. Paul, each one of us has been given abundant fruit of the Spirit. Our children have been learning, singing, and praying about this during Vacation Bible School this weekend. For those who were not here, the fruit of *God's Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This morning, you will receive the 'Queen of Fruits' as an outward and visible sign of God-given abundance, wild and free, accessible to all. Like the boy who handed over his bread and fish, our children are going to hand out peaches to you at the door. I want you to take one home and enjoy it.

As you wash it and peel it, and then savor the best sensation of summer, I want you to pray like this. First, I want you to think about how you have experienced abundance in your life. Then I want you to give thanks for all the ways you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Finally, I want you to resolve to share that goodness—the fruit of God's Spirit working in you—with your thoughts, your words, and your deeds.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is that you can share this fruit and not lose it. Christ takes this fruit, blesses it, breaks it, multiplies it, and shares it...fruit like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Y'all, we get to participate in God's transformation of scarcity into abundance! We get to be like the little boy who trusted his loaves and fishes to Jesus. We get to experience—up close and personal—the miraculous God-given abundance, wild and free, and accessible to all!

Dear people, this is the essence of God's will being done, and God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. This is what it means to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Amen.