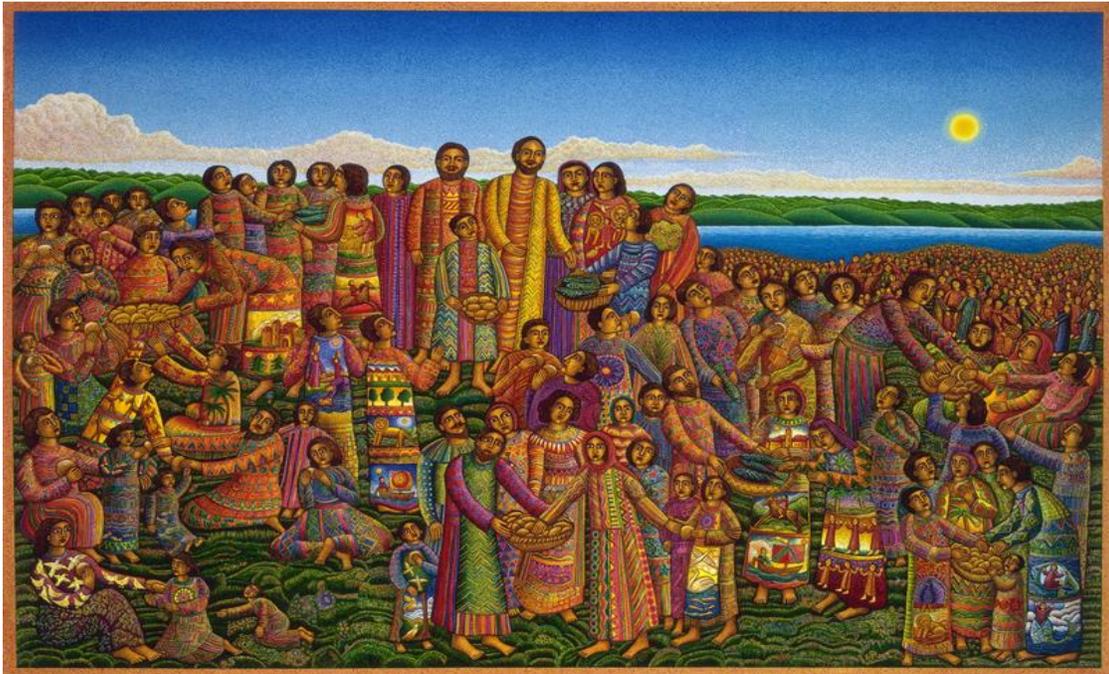


St Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska  
Message by the Rev. Catherine Amy Kropp  
Scripture: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13; Psalm 51:1-13; John 6:24-35

Sunday, August 1, 2021  
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

*Let us pray. Holy One, may we discover the peace beyond understanding and may the bread of life fill us and all the world, in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

## *Insatiable*



*Loves and Fishes* by John August Swanson<sup>1</sup>

“The next day... they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.” (John 6:24)

It is the next day, just after the great feeding, when the 5000 who were hungry are now fed; when the ones, who did not not have, now *have*. When those, who were without, now are *with*.

And yet. This crowd, after being fed, does not go home. They do not disperse or settle down. They do not even rest. Instead it is as if the people are hungrier than before, hungrier to taste and see even *more*.

There is this sense of “more” on this day after the feeding:

- more understanding that something powerful is happening, yet confusion over what it is.
- more hope and expectation, yet a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety.
- more awareness that life is much bigger than they thought, yet not enough awareness to satisfy their curiosity.

And this is the crowd that had just been fed *by Jesus*; who had eaten their fill, as much as they wanted (John 6:11-12). And now this mass of humanity is seething with questions, relentless in pursuing Jesus, and hungry for more.<sup>2</sup> The answers Jesus gives only increases the mystery as he offers the many I-am statements: I am the vine, the way, the light, the life, the shepherd, the truth, and, “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35) Jesus represents something so much bigger than the disciples and the crowd and us with all of our questions can take in.

“What is it we want when we can’t stop wanting?” This is the question Christian Wiman asks in his poetry describing this deep human hunger.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps we hunger for what we already have been given; and we long for more of it; for yet another experience of being fed. Isn’t this what happens to us in the celebration of Communion? When we come back again and again for the bread of life, to taste it, to share it, even if a pandemic separates us from one feeding to the next, for months and longer, as restrictions begin anew in yet another season of caution and precaution, safety and distancing? As we are seeking and yearning, stretching our understanding to embrace a spiritual communion of all things, with all things, in Christ. Like the crowds who have been fed and who seek more. we wait and wait, aching to return, to receive this communion *together* once again.

Perhaps we, along with the crowds in the Gospel story, are still so hungry because we are hungry to share; as if this collective hunger cannot be satiated until all are fed. Until we feed together as one body in Christ.

Until there are no food deserts.

Until there is no food insecurity.

Until all who hunger find their way to the table.

This collective hunger is a hunger that is deep and relentless and driven.<sup>4</sup> Sara Miles writes of the bread of life as that which fills her with “a deep desire to reach for and

become part of the body..." and that which compels her to find new ways to share what she has experienced.<sup>5</sup>

What inspires us to enter ever more into a sacramental universe?

Our hunger has so many kinds. We hunger for relief from the burden of our humanity. We feel this burden in the story of David. The sense of getting it wrong, the list of misdeeds, and being confronted by our human weakness, and feeling the burden of declaring, as David did, I have sinned against God. (2 Samuel 12:13) And Nathan the prophet pointing out the disparity between those without and those with, those who are fed and those who are not. We know that there is something important for us to wake up to, to do and to be.

As Ilia Delio writes, "Every part of the globe is inhabited by the human species, and we are all now confronted by a new reality on this earth."<sup>6</sup> There is in this reality a great human deprivation, fatigue, and sense of being worn down.

And, yet, in our human hunger there is also hope and promise and new life, something unfolding, something within us being unveiled. Perhaps we glimpse this in the thrill of seeing an extraordinary human achievement unfold, as in the Olympic games in Tokyo. The thrill just in being someone who gets to watch! The thrill even of watching an extraordinary watch party as we did when Lydia Jacoby, the 17 year old from Seward, came in first.<sup>7</sup>

Isn't this also a spiritual food? When we fall into something so big, when we feel enthralled, isn't this also manna from heaven? When, in one moment of intense focus, all of the messiness within us somehow dissolves into a collective rejoicing, even a cleansing, as in the psalm: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

And Simone Biles, the gymnast, boldly choosing to withdraw from the competition to protect her mental and physical health, to do what the wisdom of her body was telling her instead of the demands of the world.<sup>8</sup> The vulnerability of saying I have limits, I matter, my health and wellbeing matters above the expectations of the world.

What are we really hungry for? Are we hungry for competitiveness and individual achievement? Or a shared sense of humility, collective food, and our communion within a greater sense of becoming?

If the bread of God is that which gives life, and new life, to the world (John 6:35), then it is in our lives together that we are giving, life-giving, including all our aching, yearning, and restless seeking.

As we will sing together this morning during the Communion: We want to walk as the children of the light. We want to follow Jesus. God set the stars to give light to the world. The star of our lives is Jesus. In him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in our hearts, Lord Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

Amen.



The watch party in Seward, Alaska, at the moment Lydia Jacoby comes in first in the 100m Breaststroke in the Tokyo Olympics. <https://fb.watch/6-eo2sqB3Q/>

## READINGS

**2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a**

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

## Psalm 51:1-13

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness;  
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

Wash me through and through from my wickedness  
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you only have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight.

And so you are justified when you speak  
and upright in your judgment.

Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth,  
a sinner from my mother's womb.

For behold, you look for truth deep within me,  
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.

Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure;  
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.

Make me hear of joy and gladness,  
that the body you have broken may rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence  
and take not your holy Spirit from me.

Give me the joy of your saving help again  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

### **John 6:24-35**

The next day, when the people who remained after the feeding of the five thousand 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."

## I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

Hymnal #490

I want to walk as a child of the light.  
I want to follow Jesus.  
God set the stars to give light to the world.  
The star of my life is Jesus.

*Refrain* In him there is no darkness at all.  
The night and the day are both alike.  
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.  
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

I want to see the brightness of God.  
I want to look at Jesus.  
Clear sun of righteousness, shine on my path,  
and show me the way to the Father.

I'm looking for the coming of Christ.  
I want to be with Jesus.  
When we have run with patience the race,  
we shall know the joy of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Swanson, John August. *Loaves and Fishes*, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=56553> [retrieved July 31, 2021]. Original source: [www.JohnAugustSwanson.com](http://www.JohnAugustSwanson.com) - copyright 2003 by John August Swanson.

<sup>2</sup> “In the Gospel of John, people come to Jesus again and again, seeking to understand him. The question of his identity, who he is and where he came from, is the central theme. No other document in the New Testament is more explicit in its answers to that question, yet those answers remain ironic or paradoxical, as often repelling as persuading the men and women with whom Jesus speaks. In the sixth chapter we see first “the crowd,” then the disciples, trying to grasp the enigma of Jesus by using the best tools their religion supplies: the evidence of miracles, tradition, and Scripture. Yet each of these tools shatters when confronted with this One who seems to belong to another world.” Wayne A. Meeks, writing in *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1* (Prophets 3-16) (Kindle Locations 10410). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Wiman, Christian. *He Held Radical Light* (p. 7). Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Kindle Edition;

““What is it we want when we can’t stop wanting?” poet Christian Wiman asks in his book *He Held Radical Light: The Art of Faith, the Faith of Art*. A devastating diagnosis of potentially terminal cancer raised profound questions of the meaning and purpose of life for Wiman and led him to a reconsideration of Christian theology and Christian faith. It also prompted him to probe his own experience of deep spiritual hunger.” John M. Buchanan, in *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship* (p. 211). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> “According to Jesus, hunger for bread represents a deeper, spiritual hunger. It is the theme of an exchange between Jesus and a crowd of hungry people who have been following him for days. The author of the Fourth Gospel describes the crowd that follows Jesus as relentless, determined, driven. They are not about to be distracted or discouraged. Their hunger is deep, palpable.” John M. Buchanan, in *Connections: A*

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*Lectioary Commentary for Preaching and Worship* (p. 211). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> “The mysterious sacrament turned out to be not a symbolic wafer at all but actual food - indeed, the bread of life. In that shocking moment of communion, filled with a deep desire to reach for and become part of the body, I realized that what I’d been doing with my life all along was what I was meant to do: feed people. And so I did. I took communion, I passed the bread to others, and then I kept going, compelled to find new ways to share what I’d experienced.” Sara Miles, *Take This Bread* (Ballantine Books, 2007), p. xi.

<sup>6</sup> Ilia Delio, *The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science, and the Human Journey* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2021); p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> Lydia Jacoby’s win in the 100m breaststroke: <https://youtu.be/NXfOaRqcOKE>; and the video of her watch party: <https://fb.watch/6-eo2sqB3Q/>

<sup>8</sup> Juliet Macur, “Simone Biles Said She Was Not in a Good Place Mentally to Continue,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 2021, sec. Sports, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/27/sports/olympics/russia-wins-gold-medal-gymnastics.html>.

<sup>9</sup> 1982 Hymnal #490