

Bread of Life

John 6:35

September 5, 2021 – Center Harbor Congregational Church

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John 6:35: 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.”

On Labor Day when I was young, my whole family would gather at my grandmother’s house for a big feast. My sister and I would spend Sunday night with my grandmother, and the rest of the family would join us on Monday in time for the big midday meal.

My grandmother always made brisket for Labor Day. She had a special secret recipe, which I have today. She would coat her brisket in the secret sauce and double wrap it in heavy duty foil, then cook it all night long in the oven. All through the night the tantalizing aroma of that brisket would float throughout the house and tickle my nose, and I would wake up in the morning with my mouth watering. It smelled sooooo good! I could hardly wait until noon for that meal. I did everything I could to rush it along. I pared potatoes and shucked corn and set the table. I probably asked a hundred times how long it would be till everyone arrived. Then, finally, when grace had been said and the dinner was served, I would take that first bite. The rich, slow-cooked flavors of that beef and that sauce just burst in my mouth, and I was in heaven. Today, when I make brisket with my grandmother’s secret recipe, I am trying to recapture the taste of that brisket. But even more, when I make brisket, I am trying to transport myself back to that feeling of comfort and safety, of knowing that I was perfectly cared for, when I woke up in my grandmother’s house and smelled the brisket that had been cooking all night long.

It is not only foods from childhood that can affect us this way. I first ate *frutti di mare* when I was 48 years old. In case you’ve never had it, *frutti di mare* is all kinds of shellfish poached a white wine and butter sauce and served over pasta. The first time I ever had this wonderful dish, I was sitting in a tiny restaurant in New York City after a day of sight seeing with Dave. We had looked in the window at Tiffany’s and visited FAO Schwarz, the famous toy store that is no more. We went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and to Central Park, where we rode in a hansom cab. The day was chilly and windy, and we had walked miles and miles. I was exhausted. Before heading to the Port Authority Terminal for our bus back to New Jersey where we were visiting Dave’s brother, we stopped in a tiny Italian restaurant called Joey’s Paisano. That was the night, that was the place, where Dave proposed to me. It was a perfect end to a wonderful day. Whenever I eat *frutti di mare* now, I not only am hoping to taste the rich flavors of shellfish simmered in wine and butter. No, I am hoping also to recapture just a tiny spark of the magic of that day in New York City and the moment that Dave proposed to spend the rest of his life with me.

Maybe you are one of those people who make all your choices about food based solely on nutrition. If so, I bless you in your self-discipline. But for most of us, food is all mixed up with our memories and our relationships and our feelings. Sometimes it’s hard to know what exactly we are hungry for. Do we really want a cookie? Or are we more deeply looking for comfort for some hurt, like a childhood skinned knee ... or a very adult bruised ego? If we get a cookie without the hug and the band-aid that goes along with it, our hurts won’t be soothed, and we will still feel empty.

What is it we are really hungry for?

Jesus knew the difference between physical hunger and spiritual hunger. He knew the difference between food to fill an empty belly and food to fill the hole in your heart. "I am the bread of life," he said. "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

What are you really hungry for this morning? What is the hole in your heart that needs to be filled?

When we come to the communion table, we bring to our Lord all the empty places in ourselves, the skinned knees of our lives, the broken places in us, the deep regrets. Our Lord sees these empty places in us, and he fills us with a love that is so profound, so unconditional, so deep, that we will never be soul-hungry again.

Amen