

The Gospel this morning has several points, woven together by St. John the Evangelist, to tell the story of spiritual motivation and spiritual fulfillment. One point is the whole question of Christian incentive. Why do we seek Jesus? What causes us to go out of our way to find and know and build a relationship with someone we can know only in spirit, in the community of the faithful and in the pages of an ancient Bible? Obviously, there is a need, a void, and an emptiness that we can only describe and understand in terms of hunger and nourishment. Spiritual hunger, like physical hunger is a powerful force. We seek Jesus because we long for something to fill the soul's void.

In the story this morning, Jesus told those who had sought him out that they did so, not because of the miracles, not because of what appeared to them as a sort of magical power, but because they were hungry and wanted to be fed. Now, there is a play, here, on an event from an earlier passage in John's Gospel. Jesus had just hours before fed five thousand people with a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread. We've heard that story any number of times and usually we look at it as a miracle story, or what St. John called a "sign" that Jesus is the Messiah. But, Jesus dismissed the "sign" thing, telling those gathered that they had not sought him for "signs." Rather, they sought him because having quenched their hunger once, they wanted that nourishment again.

There was no condemnation of these folks for their motivation. Instead Jesus built on this very human need, by telling them that yes, he could feed them when they were hungry, but their hunger went beyond their physical needs. God, through Moses, fed his people when they were starving in the desert. God, in Jesus, feeds us when we hunger in our hearts. Christian experience tells us that God provides. Christian faith tells us that God will continue to provide. Jesus tells us today, just as he told the people during his earthly ministry, that in him God's provision is both now and eternal, physical and spiritual, but what is really important is the health of our souls and our hope for eternal life. In the passage this morning, Jesus said, "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."

The second point in this story of spiritual longing and fulfillment is our side of the nourishment equation or, if you will, our spiritual digestive process. What is required of us when we find Jesus? The question in the Gospel this morning is phrased this way, "What must we do to be doing the works of God?" The answer is straightforward and simple. To know Jesus, to dwell with Jesus, to be nourished and fed by Jesus is to believe in Jesus. If we do not accept the reality of the Holy Spirit active in this world, the reality of Jesus present in our lives, there is not a whole lot that God can do for us. We come to God through and only through our relationship with his only Son, Jesus the Christ. At the end of the passage this morning, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; he who

comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.” When we come to Jesus, we find that our spiritual needs are met in full. The bread of life feeds us.

Each of us, as unique individuals, has our own needs, anxieties, regrets, questions, failures and hopes and these things together make up our hunger. It is in these needs, fears, sins and guilt that we discover ourselves as hungry selves, unfulfilled selves, broken selves in desperate need of fulfillment, in need of spiritual nourishment. These aspects of our selves we must carry to Jesus and trust him to know what to do with them. We must say to him, “Into your hands, O Lord, I give my life, fully, completely, and ask back from you only that you fill my void with your will for my life.” When we do this, then truly, in the words of today’s Gospel, we shall not hunger, for truly we have received the bread of life. *Amen.*