

May I speak in the name of the Triune God,
Who was, Who is, And who is to come.
Amen.

Good morning.
My name is Shane Sanders Marcus,
And I'm the Minister for Children, Youth, and Families at St. John's Episcopal
Church,
Just right up the hill on Sheridan Avenue.

All of the readings we heard this morning center on bread.
God providing bread for God's people in the wilderness,
And Jesus –
Who, for context, had just miraculously fed a crowd of 5,000 people
With a paltry few loaves of bread and two small fish –
Jesus, who tells the crowd
I am the Bread of Life.
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.

At St. John's we have the unbelievable gift
Of a parent who comes in every Sunday morning from September to May
Bringing with him a freshly baked loaf of challah for every Sunday School
classroom.

You'll believe me when I say
That it is the highlight of most every Sunday for most every child at St. John's.
More than religious instruction
Or Prayer
Or craft projects
Or Friends
Or Community
Or Spiritual Discipline
Or Freedom to run through the hallways without their parents.
Somehow it all seems to pale in comparison
To Bread.

Everywhere we go, there is bread to be had, bread in abundance.

Challah.
Donuts.
Brioche. Sourdough. French Toast.

Pizza!
Pancakes. Bagels.
Sweet Rolls.
Pie Crust. Pita.
Muffins. Breadsticks.
Croissants.
Naan. Tortilla.
Hamburger buns, hot dog buns, Hoagie rolls,
Whole Wheat, White, Multi-Grain, Gluten Free.

15 years later, I still remember the first time
I had a roll with that cinnamon butter at Texas Roadhouse. Mm.

In this pair of stories,
These Holy Readings that in the church we call Sacred Scripture,
God is talking to God's people about Bread.
And Jesus says to us:

I am the Bread of Life.

Our tradition at St. John's,
As it is at nearly every Episcopal church in the country
And many Anglican churches all over the world,
Is to take Jesus' words very, very seriously.
Each week, we gather together to listen to Holy Scripture,
Sing songs, share the peace of God with each other,
And always,
To share communion together,
Hearing every week, each one of us,
The Body of Christ, the Bread of Life.

We take our holy meals so seriously
That we even mark the very time of our life together with feasting and fasting,
Gathering on holy days for meals and celebrations,
Whether at the Feast of All Saints in November or Christmas or Epiphany in
January,
And even our raucous and loud jambalaya and pancake supper
On Mardi Gras, the day before Lent begins.

Our parents share fellowship together
Every Wednesday night,

Over meals during children's choir.
And, as I've mentioned,
Every Sunday our children rush to eat their challah bread
Even as they learn to pray and to listen and to become community together.

We all need bread.

But even in all the examples I've shared,
Of how we in our community have organized our lives around
Frequent meals and feasts
And the weekly celebration of communion and the bread of life,
There's a simple but profound truth.
The bread of life isn't *only* about bread.

The bread fills our stomachs, sure.
And it makes us feel
safe,
secure,
full,
even happy.
Bread is what returns us to ourselves.

It's like the set of Snickers commercials.
Do you know the ones I'm talking about?
There's one with a group of guys playing football
With a grandmother in the middle of the game?
And after she gets knocked over,
Everyone rushes to her with concern
And they hand her a Snickers bar.
And after she eats it,
Poof! She transforms back into a football player,
The version of himself he couldn't be while he was hungry.

We cannot be who we need to be,
Who we want to be,
Who God wants us to be
If we are hungry.

When we receive the bread and the wine at communion,
It is because we believe that the most ordinary things of our lives:
Hunger, thirst, bread, wine,

- Or even the water we are baptized with
Can be transformed into extraordinary things,
And can affect us in extraordinary ways.

We believe that the simple but holy meal of bread and wine
Satisfies our hunger,
And makes us into the very thing we eat,
The body of Christ in the world.
The bread is what makes us come alive.

As the body of Christ,
We have a chance and an opportunity to be a witness to the world
Of God's grace,
By looking for, searching for, and proclaiming
The extraordinary nature of all things.

Even, the extraordinary nature of our very selves.

Howard Thurman, the spiritual mentor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Wrote this in a 1980 commencement address at Spelman College

“Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do
it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

He says that there is a space inside each of us
That is listening for “the Genuine”
Within ourselves and within each other,
And that that space is unique in each one of us.

This is the radical truth,
That when we receive the bread of life,
We are not made into something else,
But we are made more into our very selves,
The selves that God has created us to be in this world.

And filled with the bread of life,
Sustained by the cup of salvation,
We are sent out with all our passions and hopes and dreams intact.

Is your deepest passion to lift up the voices of women?
The bread of life will sustain you in that work.

Is your deepest joy to empower communities of color?

The bread of life will sustain you in that work.

Is your deepest longing to help children heal from trauma?

The bread of life will sustain you in that work.

Is your deepest hope to use music to create a space where others can feel
God's presence?

The bread of life will sustain you in that work.

The deepest passion I have found in myself is this:

That I can capture the spirit that comes over me as a camp counselor.

The spirit that makes it so that with anyone and everyone I meet –

But especially with children and teenagers –

I will be able, instantly,

To assume their extraordinariness.

To automatically see them as amazing, incredible, powerful,

And to love, encourage, and empower them to be their extraordinary selves in
the world.

To call out from my own genuine center

To their own,

And to find God within and between us.

My hope and prayer for all of us this morning,

Is that we can learn this lesson from the Bread of Life.

That we can find times and places and space in our

Over-fed and over-saturated and overwhelmed lives,

To look at the most ordinary things about our world,

About our life and community together,

And about ourselves.

And to see the extraordinary in them.

Because if we can make it a practice

To see the extraordinary in everyone we meet

And to name it,

To speak it into being,

And to be ever sustained in that work by the bread of life,

Then the Bread of Life

Will be not only what sustains us,

But what at the last enables us never to be hungry again.

Amen.