

23 August, 2009

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

John 6.56-69

All Saints' Episcopal Church

The Rev'd Noelle York-Simmons

There's a line in a song by the Indigo Girls that I love for everything it says about my heritage:

*Trouble came around here
Here in the South we fix something to eat*

We fix lots of somethings to eat, actually. We do a good job caring for people with food here in the south, don't we? Think about how many of the ministries at All Saints' alone revolve around food? E-care, Wednesday Night Supper, Guild of the Good Shepherd. You could pave Peachtree Street with the amount of pizza our youth have consumed over the years.

It is a fine southern tradition to fill with food the house of someone beset by a crisis, be it a death, an illness or even the craziness of a new baby. Shortly before Linden was born, Kevin said, "you know the best thing about having a baby? I mean, other than the baby? All the food that comes our way. Yum!"

I hope you never underestimate the power of a sacramental casserole. The physical nourishment is important: who wants to cook when there's a new baby to love on? Who can think of food when there are funeral plans to be made? But perhaps equally or even more important is the message that comes with the casserole: We are thinking about you. We love you. Take, eat.

When we feed each other, in times of joy and in times of sorrow, in our homes and in our parish hall, we strengthen the bonds of community in a way that only a good meal can. When trouble comes around here, we fix something to eat.

Our bodies are nourished by the food in front of us, but there is more to it, as generations of southern cooks know so well. There is love in there, too, and community and connection.

Jesus has been talking a lot about bread for the last three weeks. I have, in fact, even heard the words "bread again??" uttered more than once by colleagues. Clearly this is an important subject to Jesus but still one wonders if the disciples got tired of hearing about it. "Yes, Jesus, we heard you the first time. Bread bread bread. You are the bread. We don't get it, but we heard you."

What is this living bread anyway? What is Jesus talking about and what is he trying to prepare us for?

Jesus knew that trouble was coming. Jesus knew that crisis was on its way and he made sure that his disciples were going to be nourished for the journey. They didn't get it of course, they never really do. Jesus was filling their souls the way those casseroles will our bellies. And then some. Jesus knew of the crisis that the disciples had to face, and still have to face, everyday.

There was the crisis of the cross, of course, the whole story stands in the dark shadow of the cross. But there is more crisis than that. We face trouble everyday, some more frequently than others, some with deeper intensity.

And so he offered the meal that would most completely prepare his disciples, for the crises that we face in our lives, one made of his own perfect self. Take, eat.

And those that stayed and those that believe ate and were nourished.

When trouble comes around here, here at All Saints' we fix something to eat. When we fix the physical meal for one another, at Wednesday Night Supper or SNL pizza night or a meal to a family in grief, we come around the table, fellowship, and nourish our bodies. When we come for communion, we also come around the table, we pray, and we nourish our souls.

Just as the food offered to the family in crisis is so much more than a sum of its parts but is a whole that brings with it love, affection, connection to the outside world and nourishment of the body and soul, the Eucharist, too, is more than just a cup of port and some crackers.

Through the act of the Eucharist, we are reminded about one another, about community, and are sent out in to the world to bring the community at large closer together.

We ask the blessing over the bread and the wine then we feast on the Body and Blood of our Lord. We get our spiritual nourishment with the physical elements. We take, we eat, we are strengthened, we go out into the world, a little stronger, a little more able.

That is how we deal with trouble around here. That is also how we deal with joy. We feast.

When you do this, when you accept the Christ's gift of fleshly food offered, you connect yourselves to the community of Christ, to the person kneeling next to you and the person placing the bread in your hand, but also to the one in the hospital about whom we pray, to the woman who can't leave her house, to the refugee family ready to join our ranks, to the child clothed from Threads.

We need those casseroles and that pizza. We need the physical meals to keep us going, to keep us connected, to remind us of one another and to sustain us. But the flesh is finite. The spirit is eternal. We must feed the spirit on the food given to us graciously by

our God and creator. This, too, is food for the journey. This is the food that will connect us even more deeply to our community across the world and through time. The food that we receive on our knees at the altar is also the bread of joy and the bread of sorrow, given to us with arms outstretched, loving, pleading

Take, eat; drink this all of you. The one who eats this bread will live forever.