

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

"Perishable Verses Enduring"

Rev. Fred Weimert - Thanksgiving, 2010
at Towson United Methodist Church

One of the more exasperating moments in life
will be repeated

Over and over again today...

In hundreds of homes across America...

An exasperating moment,

especially for the person

who will have worked for hours

to prepare dinner for a family...

and possibly worked then for hours

to clean up from the feast...

Just as the last dish has been washed and dried...

and everything has been put away...

and the last counter has been wiped clean...

Someone, looking lost,

is going to come quietly into the kitchen,

Some one who not more than an hour or two earlier

had said *"I'm so stuffed..."*

*I am probably not going to be able to eat again
for at least a month..."*

That same someone is going to come

sheepishly wandering into the kitchen

as if looking for something that had been misplaced...

And the meal preparer is going to say

in their best accusatory voice...

"You're not hungry are you?"

The response will be subdued...

"Not really, but I just thought there might be something."

"Well, if there is something..."

It is going to be something

that you find and fix for yourself.

Because I am finished in here...

until tomorrow morning."

I know that this scene is going to be repeated in my house today,
and probably in your house as well...

It has to happen,

because we really, can't go
 without "eating for a month."
 We might make it for an hour or two
 possibly even for a day or two,
 but that wouldn't be easy,
 and it would not be pleasant for those
 who have to be around us...
 during that time of depravation.
 It is one reason I don't much go in for fasting...
 I know it is suppose to be
 spiritually cleansing,
 It is suppose to
 help one focus on God.
 but when I have had to go without food...
 As I was forced to do
 back in survival school
 in the Navy.
 When ever I have had to go without food,
 I don't think about God,
 I think about food...
 Or what I will eat
 when I get back to civilization,
 and what I have eaten after those experiences...
 has been an absolute travesty...
 The first time it was:
 a bag of cheese curls,
 and a bag of mini Hershey bars...
 I can still remember it...
 not so fondly.
 The next time I was a little more careful.
 careful enough
 that I don't remember what I ate
 after my second survival school,
 but I know
 I did need to eat.

And I will need to eat again after lunch today...

It is just the nature of the beast...

the nature of our being

and the nature of food that is perishable
 so what is the food which is enduring.

The Gospel reading for today

from John 6 talks about this perishable and enduring food.

Earlier on in the Chapter

John tells us the story of the feeding of the 5,000,

Which some of you may feel you are repeating today.

In John's version he actually gives us a date for this miracle...
it is near the Jewish celebration of Passover.

Which may be why
in today's text we hear mention
of the manna in the wilderness.

It may also be what leads John
to picture Jesus, later in the chapter
after today's reading...
as speaking Eucharistically
about the bread being his body,
and the wine his blood...

Even though the feeding of the 5,000
had been bread and fish...

Still Passover was near...
and there would be unleavened bread
and wine.

In today's reading
the mass feeding had been a day before...
The disciples had been sent on ahead
across the sea of Galilee...
John indicated that Jesus had done this
because he sensed the people wanted to seize him
and make him king.

And as we begin in verse 25
Jesus had rejoined the disciples on the other side,
And the crowd had also gotten into boats
and pursued Jesus and the Disciples to Capernaum.

John 6: 25 - 35

*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.

Here ends the reading.

When I first came here to Towson,

more than 33 years ago,

Towson Presbyterian Church,

use to sponsor Clergy Education Programs...

and all of the local ministers were invited to attend.

Peg Shelling, who was the Minister of Education,

at Towson Pres.

would get some of the most famous scholars

from around the country.

One year she had John Westerhoff...

Who at that time, was turning out about a book a year.

Most of his works were about children and education,

but some were on worship and sacrament.

I don't remember his subject from that day,

but at one point he got talking about

the Eucharist in his own Episcopalian tradition.

He was speaking about the wafers they used,

and at first he referred to it as "*Fish Flakes*,"

which we all found quite humorous.

Then he said,

*"The only thing that is more difficult
than imagining this stuff
to be the body of Christ...
Is to imagine it to be bread at all."*

Now for communion in most Baptist congregations,
including Calvary,
we use little cutup squares of bread,
I don't know what you use here at Towson Methodist.
But I don't think that churches that use wafers
or the pressed out little hard wheat squares,
that I use to get at my Disciples of Christ College...

I don't think those Congregations use those,
just because they are easier to store for a long time,
or because they don't want to see
those squares representing the body of Christ
being scattered on church lawns for birds to eat.
I think they probably use those wafers, with the little crosses,
because they don't want us
to confuse the perishable daily bread
of our tables...
with the imperishable bread from heaven,
which we encounter at the Lord's Table...
something very special,
The bread of Heaven...
Jesus.

What brought about the conversation and confusion
here in today's scripture reading...
was that the crowd who had pursued Jesus
was still in search of a sign,
even after the miraculous feeding,
and maybe since there had been this mass feeding...
and they wanted the food to continue...
and Passover was near...
the sign they got in their heads
was the Manna...
the bread from heaven.
So they brought that up...
That Exodus, wilderness stuff,
and, as you remember in those stories,
The manna in the wilderness,
was spoken of
as "the bread from Heaven,"
You may also remember

That manna had a terribly short shelf life.
 You had to eat what you collected that day.
 If you tried to save it
 it would spoil...
 and get worms.
 The only day it would stay fresh
 was the Sabbath.

So maybe John was taking another shot at Judaism here...

 Maybe John was having Jesus imply...

 You had the bread from heaven,
 but you complained about it...

 You wanted meat,

 You longed for the fleshpots of Egypt.

 And besides that your bread quickly spoiled.

 Then when you entered the Promised Land...

 that bread from heaven stopped all together.

 It perished...

 Or maybe your desire for it perished...

 When you ate from the fleshpots
 of the Promised Land.

I don't know that this is the correct reading of this passage,

And **I wouldn't want you**

to develop an attitude toward Judaism

 which spoke of them having perishable bread

 while we had the bread that was imperishable.

 Certainly God is eternal...

 and therefore imperishable...

 for all who come to God for nourishment.

 And God is the source to which we pray...

"give us this day our daily bread..."

 And even thought

 the bread of heaven is imperishable...

 Our craving for this Bread of Heaven is daily.

 So communion,

 the Lord's Supper,

 The Eucharist

 is served with regularity.

And while we may sing in "Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah"

"Bread of Heaven

Feed me till I want no more."

I pray that day of satiation

 with God's imperishable nourishment will never come.

May we ever find ourselves hungry

for nourishment from God...

not out of greed or gluttony,

but because we know

that nothing else on earth can satisfy...

or provide us with

that minimum daily requirement

of Grace and Love...

that Jesus gives us.

So may we ever wander into God's kitchen

looking for something

beyond our understanding

that will bring new life in us

on earth. Amen.