

FIRST READING

First Kings chapter 18 describes the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. The contest proves that the LORD is God, and afterward Elijah orders the killing of the Baal prophets. Angered by the deaths of her prophets, Queen Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah. This reading finds Elijah fleeing, fatigued, and in utter despair.

1 Kings 19:4-8

⁴[Elijah] went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."⁵ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." ⁸He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 34:1-8

¹I will bless the LORD at all times;
the praise of God shall ever be in my mouth.

²**I will glory in the LORD;**
let the lowly hear and rejoice.

³Proclaim with me the greatness of the LORD;
let us exalt God's name together.

⁴**I sought the LORD, who answered me**
and delivered me from all my terrors.

⁵Look upon the LORD and be radiant,
and let not your faces be ashamed.

⁶**I called in my affliction, and the LORD heard me**
and saved me from all my troubles.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear the LORD
and delivers them.

⁸**Taste and see that the LORD is good;**
happy are they who take refuge in God!

SECOND READING

Christians are called to be imitators of God. This does not mean Christians are perfect. Rather, the Spirit is at work in our lives so that our actions and attitudes genuinely reflect the love and forgiveness we have received through Christ and his death.

Ephesians 4:25—5:2

²⁵So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³²and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. ^{5:1}Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ²and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*GOSPEL READING

After feeding more than five thousand people in the wilderness, Jesus teaches them regarding the true significance of this remarkable sign.

The gospel according to John 6:35, 41-51

Glory to you, O Lord.

³⁵Jesus said to [the crowd,] “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ⁴¹Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴²They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” ⁴³Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever

believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Sermon of August 8, 2021

Two weeks ago, I went with my aunt, cousin, and her husband to some of the Amish shops in the Cashton area. In addition to offering produce, some of them had homemade canned and baked items. They had corn, cucumbers, string beans, other vegetables, canned pickles and dilly beans, as well as baked goods.

The many loaves of freshly baked bread came to my mind as I thought about this sermon. Bread is something that we expect to find at most Amish bake shops and grocery stores. It is a staple food that we eat almost every day. It is something that is typically plentiful, that we can find in abundance. And yet, last year, bread was not always available in the U.S.

The pandemic in 2020 fostered an increase in home baking, and as a result, a greater need for flour and yeast. While the early hoarding of basic food supplies had some effect on the availability of bread, people from across the country also shifted from eating at schools and restaurants to eating at home. As such, we were buying more bread, more flour, and more yeast, which affected the supply and demand.

Shops and grocery stores providing bread and bread supplies were forced to adjust. Ananth Iyer of Purdue University states, "Companies basically returned to their roots, used their capacity efficiently, and decreased variety in order to keep the shelves full of products" ("These Pandemic Food Shortages Caught Everyone By Surprise. Here's How They Happened," Sarah Juta, May 13, 2021, *Foodandwine.com*). As yeast and flour use went way up, this led to shortages of these two items. And yes, there was even a black market for yeast! (Same as above,

Foodandwine.com).

Thankfully, a recent online article indicated that 2 of the "5 Food Shortages You Won't See in 2021," (Eat This, Not That, Steven John, January 10, 2021) are flour and yeast. That is positive news. Yet, it brings us back to thinking beyond bread, flour and yeast, to the bigger question of scarcity and abundance in the world. What is happening today?

What we are seeing in 2021, is decreased crop production and access to water. Drought conditions are affecting crops. Drought conditions are also causing wildfires, which are negatively impacting community water sources and access to clean water. Crops are being damaged by wildfires too, and animals are being killed or forced off farms and ranches. All of these things have decreased food supplies. And the reason for these drought conditions-- the wildfires, and decreased food production-- is society's lack of attention to climate change. Scarcity or abundance? Which will prevail? That depends in part on us.

While some persons would wrongfully wish to blame God for society's ills, it is our collective lack of attention to climate change over the years that has led to our current problems! It is our individual, and/or collective focus on our own wants and needs, our comforts and desires that has brought about these problems of scarcity. God's provisions for the world have been abundant and plentiful. Yet, we as a society have not distributed God's provisions equitably. Scarcity or abundance?

Our gospel passage for today speaks of a different kind of bread than the kind found at the Amish bakery shops. It is the bread that provides in abundance. It is the bread that gives life. For Jesus tells us that he is "the bread of life." Jesus is the bread that gives life, abundant life!

In recent weeks, we have heard about the one, Triune God providing for the basic needs of God's people. God supplied manna to the wandering Israelites during their 40-years in the

desert. God provided water from a rock, when water from other sources was unavailable. God provided for the Israelites in their time of need. And Jesus fed the 5,000 men, plus women and children. All were fed. All were filled. All received in abundance.

But our gospel passage for today is not as much about the physical bread that God provides, as it is about Jesus as "the bread of life." How can Jesus call himself by this title? It has to do with God and God's kingdom. For God's kingdom is different from earthly kingdoms. God's kingdom is not the kingdom of Caesar, or Herod, or any earthly ruler of the past, present or future. God's kingdom is a kingdom filled with grace, love, mercy, and peace. God's kingdom is filled with abundance: food, water, and all the necessities of life to meet the needs of all of God's creation. A kingdom in which all persons experience and know God's abundance!

God's grace and love is offered to humanity when Jesus offers himself for the sake of the world. For Jesus is "the bread of life," who died to atone for the sins of all humanity, so that those who believe in him might have eternal life. Through hearing God's word, through partaking of the bread and wine in communion, through worshiping together and learning about God's kingdom, we are fed by "the bread of life." We are nourished and equipped to be God's servants in the world today. We are prepared to go out and share the good news, so that others will know of Jesus, "the bread of life, " and Jesus' gift of everlasting life.

The bread that God provides is unique. The bread that we receive from God is unlike anything that we can create of our own human abilities or our own free will. The "bread of life," is that which is freely offered to us, if we but believe in God! For it is the "bread of life," that leads us, and guides us, directs us, and sustains us on the path of justice and peace. These are things that are needed in the world today. These are things that God provides abundantly, and which are shared through our Christian service. We are God's hands and feet in the world; a

world in which God provides for all creation, abundantly. May God lead us, guide us, direct us and sustain us, as we seek to do God's will for the sake of God's world. Amen.