“Is It Life-giving?”

John 6:24-35

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From the Pulpit
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Prayer for Illumination: O God of Grace, God of Mercy, speak to us through Your Word. Stir our spirits, touch our hearts, and deepen our understanding through the words that you place on each of our hearts. And may the words that I have to offer, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name.
In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Five years ago, this month, we dropped off our oldest child, Martin, at college for his freshman year at a school that was 699.6 miles away — or by car, 11 hours and 3 minutes from home!

As you might guess, I was a mess! I’m pretty sure that I sobbed for the first two hours straight – and then was weepy for the remainder of that long car ride home, to Columbus, without Marty.

During those first couple of weeks of his college career, Marty and I checked in with each other fairly regularly as he was adjusting to campus life – and buying his textbooks, dropping and adding classes, etc.

I’ll never forget a phone conversation that we had one day as he was walking back to his dorm room – after attending the STUDENT ACTIVITIES FAIR.
He was so excited when he told me, “Mom, guess what? I signed up for:

the hiking club, a co-ed soccer team, a men’s soccer team, broom ball, the water polo club, an environmental protection student group, and I was also elected as the Instagram Activities Coordinator of my dorm!”

In my typical MOM way, I said something like, “Oh, that’s wonderful, Marty!

I’m so happy that you’re finding a number of different ways to plug in and get involved and meet new people, make new friends – but that’s A LOT of activities, and so, you’re going to have to make sure that you have plenty of time to study – and to rest – and so you just might have to pare down and prioritize that long list of activities — and so, in other words, Marty, it will be important for you to just focus on those activities that are life-giving for you.”

I could almost hear his eyes roll in that moment, as he said, “Now, don’t you worry, Mom. I’ve got this. I’ll figure it out!”

And he most certainly did!

What was I thinking? Telling my then-18 year old to choose what was “life-giving!”

My words of advice to Marty that day certainly reflected where I was on my own journey at that time – and even still today – which is often overcommitted and overscheduled – and stretched in many different directions –

(Can anyone else relate?)
… although over time, I have become more and more intentional about choosing that which feeds me – and letting go of that which depletes me …

This tender memory about Marty, from a few years back, came to mind this past week as I was reflecting on our Gospel reading for today …

You may recall that last Sunday, we made that huge leap from the direct and straightforward writing style of Mark to the now deep and rather elusive style of the Gospel writer of John.

Now, as I may have mentioned last week, I often need to “sit with” John for a time before the meaning of the text becomes clearer for me.

And so, during these past several days, I allowed myself to enter into our Gospel reading, so to speak, and when I did that, it was almost as though I was able to feel the panic and the worry and the high levels of anxiety – among those crowds of people who got into their boats to Capernaum to literally follow Jesus – by chasing him – and tracking him down!

The sense of restlessness among the crowd was palpable!

There was this seeking and a searching – and a questioning about them – that arose out of a place of their deep need to understand what had previously happened.

You may remember that in the previous verses of this same chapter (six) Jesus had fed the five thousand with just five loaves of bread and two fish – and then, as if one miracle was not enough, Jesus had
performed a second miracle that same day – when He walked on water.

And so, it’s really no wonder that the crowd, indeed, wondered about this One who was a wonder!

First, they asked Jesus, Rabbi, *when did you come here?*

And then, they inquired, *“What must we DO to perform the works of God?”*

And soon, other questions followed when they asked:

*“What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe in you?*

And –

*What work are you performing?*

And so, how does Jesus, our Rabbi and Teacher, respond to the questions of the crowd?

Not with direct answers, of course, but in metaphor – and the metaphor is BREAD.

Jesus says,

*For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*

And then he declared,

*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*
Jesus’ response to his followers then, invites us, as his followers, today, to reflect on what it is in our lives that feeds us – that truly feeds us …

What gives you life?
What is the source and the sustenance of your life?
What subtracts from your life?
What connects you to the lives of one another?
What prevents you from living fully?
How do you cultivate life within the world around you?
And what is life-giving to you…and through you?

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus calls us and challenges us and commands us to deeply examine the source of the life that we lead now -- and the Source of Life that we seek.

In your day-to-day lives, in the choices that you make, in the commitments that you keep and in all that you do – in the ways that you serve, and in the ways that you rest, in your saying yes, and in your saying no, too, may you find that which is life-giving and encounter the One who gives us life!

I’d like to close this morning with a short poem written by David Whyte, an Irish poet:
“Enough”

by David Whyte

Enough.
These few words are enough.
If not these words,
this breath.
If not this breath,
this sitting here.
This opening to the life
we have refused
again and again.
until now.
Until now.

Thanks be to God – amen!