

I'd like you to close your eyes for a minute. Now imagine you're walking into a kitchen and a warm, delectable aroma wafts in your direction, teasing your olfactory organ. As you inhale the intoxicating scent, your mouth begins to water as you hungrily recall the lip-smacking taste of homemade bread. All of a sudden, something starts making a loud racket in the background, pulling your attention away from this enticing encounter. You wake up to the sound of your alarm clock and realize it is all just a dream, there is no freshly baked food waiting for you. Disappointing, I know.

Now would (a little more than 1 out of every 10) of you please stand. I'm sorry, but this tantalizing dream is all you get. While the rest of us find something in our fridges and cabinets to satiate our salivating glands, you don't get to eat today because you don't have access to the food you need to live active, healthy lives. (*have them sit*) This is probably not true for those of you who were just now standing, but the reality of bodily hunger does affect more people than our brains can even comprehend. Starvation, famine, malnutrition and undernourishment are what scores upon scores of our neighbors, both near and far, live with every day, just like our sisters and brothers from today's gospel.

"They...got into the boats and went...looking for Jesus." An extremely large crowd, many of whom likely found themselves on the margins of society, has just been fed by Christ. Fiercely determined to retain at all costs this unending source of physical nourishment, they hastily jump into the nearest available water vessels, which might be questionable as to their sea worthiness, to cross a lake often stricken with storms in desperate search of a man. One who had just provided them an abundance of food amidst a swamp of scarcity. Living at a time and place where there was unequal distribution of

resources, and perhaps even a drought had swept over the land, their urgent eagerness to acquire more fish and loaves of bread is completely understandable. As we learn from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if one of the very basics is not satisfied, we cannot begin to attend to the other essentials. Yet, as their feet hit the shore on the other side and they encounter who they thought they were looking for, it is not their stomachs this time that will be filled, and he is not what they anticipated. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

"They...got into the boats and went...looking for Jesus." Robyn, a veteran of the U.S. army, who had found himself homeless at one point in his life, had first arrived in Northampton, MA in 2005. Devoured by mental illness and looking for a way out, that same year, as he shares in a video interview, "I killed myself, and I don't say I attempted to kill myself. I took enough booze and medication to kill myself and I felt my body shutting down. And then I woke up the next morning feeling fine. And I went to the emergency room and they couldn't find any trace of anything in me and the doctor said that it must have been divine intervention because there was no other explanation."

Starved, in more than one way, he somehow came across a hungry crowd that calls themselves the Cathedral in the Night. As an outdoor ministry to the neighborhood that provides worship where everyone can participate and a meal for people to share together every Sun, the pastor noted how when Robyn first paddled his way into the community a number of years ago, he very much stood on the edge. Over time though, as he had become more and more comfortable and as the yeast of Christ's grace rose within and around him, he followed others into that boat of leadership. And now, he helps in every part their community, using his voice, hands, and other God-given gifts as a vessel

through which the Bread of life supplies nourishment to those who, like him, find themselves combatting hunger, in its many different forms. Having had his body, soul and mind fed, Robyn asserts, “I would not be a leader in this community if not for Cathedral in the Night showing me that it was all possible...I was in the darkness and I found my way to the light and I didn’t do it alone. I found a loving God and, I feel loved. I don’t always feel worthy, but I do still feel loved.” “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

“They...got into the boats and went...looking for Jesus.” Like the crowd and Robyn, we too are looking. Looking for the perishable to assuage our hunger. I wonder though, do we, like the gospel crowd, come expecting and demanding a very particular type of nourishment? Or are we willing to be empty enough to be filled in ways we never imagined in our wildest dreams? Do we, like the gospel crowd, perceive these scripture texts as just some nice stories from the past? Or do we trust the Lord enough to see with eyes of faith the ongoing sustenance God gives us here and now? Today, at this time and in this place, the mysterious I am extends to you and me bread for our body, our soul and our mind. Today, as we pray, give us this day our daily bread, Jesus responds, “Here I am! I am the bread of life. This is my body given *for you*...this is my blood shed *for you and for all people* for the forgiveness of sin.” Today, the yeast of Christ’s grace rises within and around us.

So, as we pray, not just for our individual selves, but give *us* this day *our* daily bread, the Spirit summons you and me to get into the Redeemer’s boat, cross that uncertain lake and labor beside him so that all of the Creator’s people, present and future, may have the gifts that God lavishly rains down upon us every day. Amen.