

12th Sunday after Pentecost, 2008 (Proper 13A)

Gospel: Isaiah 55:1-5

Old Testament: Romans 9:1-13

Epistle: Matthew 14:13-21

Title: Satisfied People

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There's nothing more satisfying than a really great meal. A banquet. A feast. Think of some of the really great meals that you've had: the thanksgiving dinner when the whole family gathered around the table; the fourth of July picnic when you had more barbecued meat than you could possibly eat; your anniversary when you went out to the fanciest restaurant you could afford. Think of all those special meals that you've enjoyed over the years. What was it that made them so special, so enjoyable, so satisfying?

There are a number of different components that make for a satisfying meal. One is the **setting**, the time and the place. A special time calls for a special meal- a holiday, a birthday, a wedding, an anniversary. These are times we go all out, spare no expense. The place makes a meal special as well- a nice restaurant, a banquet hall. Your home is a special place as well, and when you put together a meal, you might do a little extra cleaning, put out the nice table-cloth, get out the good china or the silver, buy some flowers or a make centerpiece so that everything looks just right.

A second component to a satisfying meal is the **people**. When you thought of some of the great meals that you shared, you probably thought of meals that you enjoyed together with special people: with your family, with your spouse, with your close friends. Meals are more than just an excuse to nourish our bodies. They are social occasions, a time for fellowship, a time to tell stories. Great meals are filled with joyful conversations. Nothing ruins a meal more quickly than when the guests don't get along.

Another component to a satisfying meal, of course, is the **food**. It may be a family favorite, a traditional dish that has been passed down for generations. It may be a new, exotic cuisine that you're trying for the first time. Satisfying meals are filled with food that is the best, the freshest, prepared with care. And there is always more than enough to go around.

Another component to a satisfying meal is great **service**. As much as I enjoy being the host and serving guests, it can be very stressful to manage all the details of special meal. It's wonderful when you can just sit back and relax, enjoy the company and the food and not have to worry about cooking, serving and cleaning up. In the best meals, someone else takes care of all the details.

Finally, the most satisfying meals are **free**. Often great food and great service comes at a great price, and you may dread getting the bill at the end of a meal. The best

meals are when someone else not only takes care of the cooking and the serving and the clean-up, but also picks up the check.

In our gospel lesson for today, we see one of the most satisfying meals of all time. But the disciples don't see things that way from the start. First, the setting is all wrong. The timing is bad. It's already evening, it's getting late, too late to serve a proper meal. (Jesus should have been keeping a closer eye on the clock.) The place is all wrong, too. The disciples call the place a wilderness, a desert. There's no proper restaurants or grocery stores, there's not even a 7-11 to buy some snacks for the people.

Second, the people are a problem. There are far too many people. There's no way that they can take an edge off their hunger, let alone satisfy a crowd so large. Also, these people were sick, and poor, not the kind of folks you'd want at your dinner table.

Then there's the food. The food isn't that appetizing, and there's not much of it either- a few dinner rolls and a couple fish. Certainly not anything to get excited about.

So what is the disciples' solution? Send them away. They use the same Greek word that also means "divorce." "Look, Jesus, you did your thing- healed a few people, put smiles on a few faces, but you we all knew this couldn't last forever, so for everyone's good, why don't you just call it a night." The disciples don't want to be bothered with caring for the people, and so their solution is to let the people fend for themselves. Let them find a store and they can buy their own food, If they can't afford anything, then it's tough luck.

Now Jesus' approach to the situation is the complete opposite. He will not send His people away. He will not have them buying food for themselves, fighting with one another for the meager resources of one of the small towns. The Lord's way is the way of gift.

The disciples begin by complaining and telling the Lord what to do. Jesus begins with prayer and thanksgiving. He looks to heaven and blesses God for the gifts He has received of bread and fish. And then He gives those gifts to those who are hungry. Where do we begin- by complaining and telling God what He should do to fix things, or by giving thanks and putting what we've been given to good use?

Even in the most difficult of circumstances, the Lord feeds His people. He makes a place for them on the grass, gives them food delivered by the disciples, and all for free. And they are satisfied. There's more than enough- even leftovers.

The Lord has made you His people. Last week we heard how Jesus sought you out and purchased you with His own blood. After making you His people, the Lord cares for you, providing for all your needs. One of those needs is for food. We pray for our daily bread and the Lord graciously provides for us and we are satisfied. He opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing.

And the Lord also prepares a feast, a banquet for us. The setting may seem strange. On Sunday morning at 9:45 am, most people are still waking up and getting a cup of coffee, thinking about breakfast, but certainly not sitting down to a banquet. But today is the Lord's Day, the day of resurrection, the eighth day, a day of new creation. It is a day for celebration and feasting. This is the feast of victory for our God.

This place may seem a strange place for a feast as well. Downstairs would be much more logical. Here there is only a small table and a rail. Certainly not enough room for all of us. But the Lord has set aside this place for His own. He covers His table with linen cloths to point to His body- once wrapped for burial. And He uses His best silver.

As you look around you, you may be surprised by the company that the Lord has gathered for this feast. A motley crew of sinners. People you may not see more than once a week. Your best friends and closest relatives might not even be here.

And it's more than just you and I that are gathered around this table. Your loved ones who have died in the Lord are here, too- your parents and grandparents, your husband, your wife, your children who are now with the Lord. The Lord is here now, and so are they. As we sing the Sanctus "with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven", heaven comes down to earth and all God's people join in the banquet.

And the meal- a small dry wafer of bread and sip of wine. It doesn't seem impressive. But what you receive here is the very body and very blood of our Lord Himself. There is no finer fare in all the world than what you receive right here.

Those who serve this meal are sinful men with their own faults and failings. But the pastor stands in the place of Christ Himself, and when He speaks to you "This is My Body" "This is My Blood," you hear the voice of the Lord.

And it's all free. The finest banquet in all the world given to you at no cost. For your Lord and Savior already paid the bill by His death on the cross.

This meal is a foretaste of the final meal, the great heavenly banquet of the lamb. The setting will be out of this world. The guests will be the baptized, the redeemed of the lamb. Kenneth just received his invitation a few moments ago, and he has been promised a place at the table. The food will be the finest meats and the best wine. And it is all given to you for free.

So come, eat, drink, and be satisfied.