

Sustenance ~ August 8, 2008
Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21; Psalm 17:1-7, 15

There have been times in my life that I have paused in what I have been doing and wondered just what it is that sustains me. Some of the times I have asked myself this, I have been very tired—that bone weary kind of tiredness that tells me I cannot go one more inch forward. I am physically wrung out, exhausted. During times like these, I simply collapse for a while and find that my renewal comes from a time of rest and withdrawal.

There are other times I have wondered, as I keep moving quickly through life, what it is that keeps me going without pause and with no sense of being tired—what sustains and supports me during those frenetic times-- times when there can be no thought of rest or collapse. Some say I am tooling along on nothing but nerves. That may be true, but I know that there is something deep within me that moves me forward.

We all have these times in our lives but it is a rare when we stop to wonder how it is we keep going at all. We are all driven by different motivators in life. Sometimes it is love, devotion and a strong sense of commitment that renews us and gives us the ability to keep going beyond the edge of our strength. Just a look at Herb and John, these past years gives us an idea of what devotion to another person looks like. They are not alone in possessing this quality. Friendships and closer relationships are often held together and given flesh by love and devotion—two qualities that encourage us never to give up but to try once again to make things new and workable as we adapt to life.

In our readings for this morning we are told to look for the true food that satisfies our needs—not to settle for things that are cheap and superficial for nourishment.

God makes a covenant through Isaiah with the nation Israel promising it much if it will incline its ear to its Creator and learn about the way it is to live and move and have its being. Jesus feeds five thousand with a few loaves and fishes to remind them that all they have comes from God. He caught them with food that sustained them physically hoping to lead them to a deeper spiritual source of sustenance. Some of them understood while others went away with their tummies full and their spirits unstirred.

During his days in the wilderness, the days of temptation, Jesus said that, “Man is not fed by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Perhaps, this is what sustains us and gives us hope on a deeper level when we struggle with life. When we recall the words of our scriptures that encourage us and sustain us we find ourselves lifted up on eagles’ wings and refreshed so that we can face what lies before us once more. We always need to remember that the words point beyond themselves to God and the assurance that God undergirds us at all times. God sustains and supports us in our darkest days and helps us keep moving when we feel we cannot move one more inch—those times when life and the world around us have drained us of our last drop of strength and courage. When we understand this, we find it within ourselves to sustain others—to become their bread of life.

Discovering this, we offer ourselves, and the God within us, to those who are struggling and in despair. How often has it been that we have been lifted up by a good friend, who knows just what to say, or what not to say, when we are at our lowest point?

When we believe there is no way out of a situation? How often has someone shone a light into our darkness of soul and helped us find our way back to wholeness? We feel very good when someone helps us this way. Turn about is always fair play so when we listen and keep silent and help someone untie the knots of a great puzzle or problem in life, we become that person's sustenance. While this can be very draining at times, we find that, somehow, we are never empty when we are needed. There really is an ever flowing stream within us that does not allow us to dry up and turn away from those we care for who are in distress.

We may not believe we have this within ourselves but we all do. If we can step back from life every now and then and learn about this special strength we possess, we will discover how we can reach out to others and hold them up.

This morning, during our sacrament, we take of the bread of life, which is meant to sustain us and nourish us and help us become one with Christ. It is meant to call to our minds the way Jesus fed and continues to feed people through the example of the way he lived his life. It is meant to remind us that we have the same ability to sustain others through the way we lead our lives and the way we support them with our love, forgiveness, tender care and thoughtful presence. It is meant to remind us that it is never all about us, but about all we share with those around us.

-- Amen