

Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fair warning – I talk about bread and food and hunger throughout my sermon today. I apologize if you get hungry while I’m preaching.

¹Every creature in God’s world – both human and nonhuman – has thought about food from the beginning. Because apart from water, food is the most elemental requirement for life. We can’t survive without it. And in the Bible, in the beginning, there was always enough food for every living creature to not only survive, but to thrive, because of the generosity and abundance of God.

But people, and the systems we build, messed that up. In the later chapters of Genesis, Pharaoh made preparations against a future famine. And when it hit, God’s people – the ancient Israelites – moved to Egypt because there was food there.

They traded and traded for grain and other foods, until the only thing they had to trade was themselves. And Pharaoh let them do it – ultimately enslaving them because they couldn’t afford to pay their debt.

After a time, the people cried out to God for freedom. God heard them, and called Moses to go and free them in God’s name. Pharaoh refused. So, God sent ten plagues and then Pharaoh finally relented and let the people go.

God’s people witnessed the plagues. They ate the first Passover meal on their last night of enslavement. With God’s help, they triumphantly crossed the Red Sea. In today’s Exodus reading, they’ve been free for about six weeks. And they already want to go back to Egypt.

In their defense, they were hangry. There was no food right there, ready for the taking. Not even bread, the most basic food. As they said, at least when they were in Egypt, they knew they’d have something to eat.

And God’s response to their complaining was true to who God is. God provided for them. God rained down bread from heaven, every morning. But it wasn’t what they were used to. When they first saw the manna, their question, “What is it?” was more like “What’s that?!” because they’d never seen anything like it before.

But between the manna and quail, they were fed well. As long as they only took what they needed. For the manna, that meant about half a gallon per person. If they took extra, it rotted within the day – like worms and stench. *Everyone* knew if someone had taken extra.

Because this was about more than being fed. It was about learning to trust God. They were in a vulnerable situation, both physically and spiritually. ²This food was a free gift – one that they couldn't control, or plan for, or own.

But the need to get up every day and go get their food developed their cooperation and trust in God, day by day, over time.

They learned that the food was a clear sign that YHWH was God, and no one else. No one else was their provider. And they eventually came to trust the abundance of God's provision.

The economy that it created is often called a "manna economy" – an economy of abundance. One in which everyone takes *only* what they need, so that everyone can *get* what they need. It's a way of living that builds community and embodies trust in God.

But it's an economy that's at odds with the one Pharaoh created – *and* the one we live under today. An economy that perpetuates the myth of scarcity – which is a mindset of fear and anxiety that tells us we don't have enough.

And I'm not talking about genuinely not having enough and not knowing where your next meal is coming from. That's a very real and valid fear. And it's a situation that can't be ignored.

What I'm talking about is a system that tells us to take more than what we need, even if it means others go without. It's a hunger that will never be satisfied.

And the abundance of God pushes back against that. The abundance of God looks out for everyone, and teaches people to do the same. The abundance of God is what Jesus made visible.

His words in our gospel reading about being the bread of life are kind of obscure just on their own. But the feeding of the 5000 happened right before this dialogue. You know the story: lots of people gathered to hear Jesus speak, they got hungry and the only food available was 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, Jesus blessed it, and it was more than enough to satisfy their physical hunger.

But they wanted more. Afterwards, Jesus and the disciples had gone to be by themselves and get some rest, but the people kept looking until they found them because they wanted Jesus to give them more bread, literally.

But instead of doing that, Jesus explained to them about the hunger of the world, a mindset of scarcity and a way of living that can never be satisfied. But that life in him as

the bread of life overcomes that hunger and makes it possible to live a life of trust in God's abundance.

And they didn't understand right away. Even the disciples complained that it was a difficult teaching. But the disciples, and others who followed Jesus, eventually came to understand what he meant. And it changed how they approached the world.

³In April of 2020, when we were all still getting used to quarantine, a woman named Katherine Kehrli – who lives in Kirkland – was displaced from her job at the Seattle Culinary Academy. While at home, she wondered if it would be possible for people to help from their homes and get valuable nutrition to local food banks.

The answer to her question was “yes,” and it led to the creation of Community Loaves, a nonprofit that pairs home bakers with food pantries. It's now a network of almost 900 bakers in Washington, Oregon, California, and Idaho. As of last week, they've donated more than 200,000 loaves of bread and 220,000 energy cookies.

They're able to do this because health department rules vary by state. And in the states where Community Loaves operates, bread is one of the few foods allowed to be donated from a home kitchen through a program like theirs because it's fully baked and doesn't need to be refrigerated.

They have to follow approved recipes for the bread and energy cookies. They get their flour from common sources, and bake and deliver on a shared schedule twice a month.

The bakers range from former professionals to beginners. They buy their own supplies, donating the cost of ingredients and their time. Most make a few loaves per baking session, delivering them to local “hubs,” where other volunteers collect the bread and transport it to the food banks.

One of the bakers has said that she doesn't only bake to help address the physical need for food, she also does it to address the spiritual hunger for connection with neighbors. She said that it isn't so much about people knowing who she is, but that they know there's a community that loves and cares for them.

The abundance of God goes beyond manna, beyond providing literal daily bread. It teaches people to care for others, and builds community even among people who don't know each other and who may never meet.

It pushes back against the hunger of the world. The way of thinking that tells us to take and hold onto whatever we can – at the expense of others. The hunger that encourages us to nourish ourselves with the bread of power, the bread of status, material wealth, and fear.

The bread that limits life for some and outright withholds it from others. The bread that *claims* to be the bread of life, but doesn't even come close.

⁴But life in Christ fully overcomes the hunger of the world, the myth of scarcity that it sells. It teaches us to feed one another physically and spiritually; it nourishes us with the bread that brings healing and transformation and new life.

It is the bread that assures us of God's love, and mercy, and grace – and that opens our hearts to a life of trust in the abundance of God. Because it is the bread that is Jesus.

Thanks be to God! Amen.