

EATING OUR FILL  
John 6:25-35  
Sunrise Presbyterian Church  
November 20, 2016  
Martha Murchison

The smells from kitchen are enticing! In a few hours, we'll fill our plates to overflowing and sit down to our annual Sunrise Thanksgiving dinner. We'll eat - and talk - and eat some more - and visit some more - until we have simply eaten our fill. We'll head home to nap or watch a game - firm in knowledge of a full stomach and dear relationships at Sunrise. Today is a day to be thankful. It is a day to stop and take stock of what we have. It is a day to tell the stories that brought us here and the ones that keep us close. Today is a day to look around ourselves and thank God and thank one another for this congregation.

Ann Lamott writes about Thanksgiving: "We say thank you for the miracle that we have stuck together all these years - that we have each other's backs - We say thank you for the plentiful and outrageous food. We pray to be mindful of the needs of others. We savor these moments out of time, when we are conscious of love's presence - these holy moments of gratitude." When do we find holy moments of gratitude at Sunrise? What is it we find here which fills us? What teaching? - What friendships? - What projects? What singing? What is it that fills us up? Let's take a few minutes - to turn to the people around us in the pews and share with them what we are thankful for here at Sunrise. Let's tell them what means the most to us - what warms our hearts . . .

It's important to name our thanksgiving because so often we are busy - we are tired - we are worried - and our minds become unsettled and we don't notice those things which are most precious to us. Other times we want more - we want different programs or relationships --- we want deeper spiritual experiences - we want more people - and then our focus begins to dwell on what we don't have. We fail to notice what we have.

What we have here at Sunrise is quite valuable and in fact, quite precious. What we have is worthy of our offering thanks to God and to one another. What we have is worth our notice.

Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus attempts over and over to direct the disciples' attention to food. Jesus feeds the thousands who follow him and have no bread - they eat their fill and have food left over. Followers gather to Jesus because to learn more about such a miraculous sign - they hope they might be able to accomplish such miracles. But instead, Jesus tells them that they follow him

because "they ate their fill of the loaves." He tells them that he is the bread they need - he can fill them up - he can sustain them throughout life. He is, he says, the bread of life.

We stumble all over that metaphor for Jesus - what on earth does it mean? What on earth does it say about us who need to eat - physically and spiritually? It means we eat our fill at the dinner table in a few hours. It means we eat our fill as we know the grace and love of God. It means we eat our fill as we find support and care from one another. Jesus - the bread of life - fills us up in myriad and countless ways we might discover so ordinary that we take no notice of them. Poet Mary Oliver writes, "Attention is the beginning of devotion."<sup>i</sup> We can't thank God if we haven't paid attention. We can't pay attention if we don't stand still.

Today is a day to stand still - to take a look around us and pay attention to the precious people and things we see. Today is a day to thank God that we have Wednesday classes full to overflowing with tender and precious children. Today is a day to thank God that we have curious and loving youth who love to come to Sunrise - Today is a day to thank God that we have a choir that loves to sing together - today is a day to thank God for our expanding and deep mission - Today is a day to thank God for Presbyterian Women and our Prayer Shawl knitters - it is a day to thank God for all of us - every one of us. God has offered us bread and we have eaten our fill.

One thing more: Jesus offered loaves to the crowd not just to fill them up - but to show them the way to fill others. God fills us here at Sunrise not to make us feel good and satisfied, but that we might in turn go and offer our love - our food - our care - our hands - our bounty - to someone else.

This Thanksgiving I am grateful that Jesus needs my hands - my heart - my gifts. Right now our country needs some bread of life to eat - right now we need to care for one another. Let us celebrate today at Thanksgiving and work in the coming year to reach out even more to all God's children wherever we meet them. We have eaten our fill - let us offer our love to others so that they may eat their fill. Alleluia! Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Mary Oliver, *Upstream*, 8.