



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

March 23, 2009

Lent 4 2009

### The Bread of Life

In the gospel of John there are seven sayings of Jesus that begin with the words I am. The words I am are important because, in the old testament, when God is talking to Moses in exodus 3:13, Moses asks god his name. God tells him 'I am who I am'. It is from those words that we get the word Yahweh. God calls himself I am who I am and so it is not surprising that Jesus, the son of God, in the gospel of john calls himself I am, but then goes into some specifics about who I am, is.

This morning's collect references one of the "I am" sayings of Jesus. I am the bread of life.

The true bread which gives life to the world. The nourishment, the sustenance, the life giving food of Jesus. Of course this bread is given in many ways spiritually through our prayers and meditations, through our spiritual disciplines and actions. Yet it is at the last supper with his disciples that we get the request from Christ to feed on this bread in the sacrament of holy Eucharist. Jesus gives the bread to his disciples and says take eat this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Over the last 2000 years the church has called this many things like the Lords supper, the mass, the Eucharist and communion. There are different ways of believing what happens to the bread and wine as they are consecrated, and different people believe different things about the sacrament.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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And that is OK. The important thing is that we receive the sacrament because sacraments are to do with God and his children, and Gods grace working in and through his children, not about what we feel.

The early church had Eucharist as its central act of worship. There was not a time that the early church met when they did not share Eucharist.

In the middle ages during the European reformation there was a reaction against Eucharist being the primary worship service and Eucharist began to be offered once a month or even once a year. In the churches who protested against the Roman Catholic Church, hence the word Protestant, Eucharist became a kind of reward for those who proved themselves worthy. Even the English prayer book of 1662 still has the words of excommunication that had to be read at each service so that those who were deemed unworthy could not share communion.

It has been in the last 50 years that all liturgical churches have rediscovered the early church and how they shared worship. There has been not one liturgical church that has not been untouched by liturgical change. It was not some new fad that caused this. It was not some novel idea that somebody thought of. It was the scholarly work that was done on the life and worship of the early church that once again focused Eucharist as the primary worship of the community of faith. It was the life of the early church, the way they worshipped and lived and found expression in their liturgy that showed how different they were in what they did.

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The oldest documented Eucharistic prayer is one that was written by Hippolytus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. That prayer is the basis for Eucharistic prayer A in Eucharist service of rite 2 in our prayer book.

For the last 4 years from the Sunday of Easter until Trinity Sunday we have used Eucharistic prayer C at all our services.

When the prayer book revision was made in 1979 this prayer was often referred to as the star wars prayer. It is very distinctive because it draws together Eucharistic prayers from the early eastern orthodox, and the early Coptic churches. These Eucharistic prayers had a lot of congregational response and all the responses in prayer C are biblical.

There are several reasons that we use this from Easter until Trinity Sunday. Unlike all the other choices we have for Eucharistic prayers, there is a special emphasis on the creation, and there is a reference to the fall with a penitential petition.

The prayer reminds us of the Old Testament drama of God's continuing effort to draw his people back to himself. This recital of salvation history reaches its fulfillment in the proclamation of the incarnation and then the atonement. It is the only Eucharistic prayer that names almost the whole host of heaven. It is because of Easter, through Christ, that heaven and earth are joined and we all cry Holy Holy Holy.

Prayer C is the only Eucharistic prayer that refers to our baptism. This reminds us of the life of covenant we entered into when we said we want to be followers of the way of Christ.

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Eucharistic prayer C crystallizes all that went before Christ, all that came through Christ and all that will be because of Christ. And that all this was done for you.

You see Easter is about you and me and every single one of God's children.

Easter tells us that when we were still far off, God met us in his son and brought us home. Dying and living he declared your love, gave us his grace, and opened the gate of glory.

Therefore may we who share Christ's body live his risen life. We who drink his cup bring life to others. We whom the spirit lights give light to the world. And keep us firm in the hope you have set before us so we and all your children shall be free and the whole world live to praise your name.

Amen

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