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Pentecost X

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“The Bread of Belonging: Feeding One Another in a Hurried World”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I. Introduction: The Wilderness of Scarcity

If you read the opening lines of our Gospel passage today, you will notice that Jesus did not originally plan to stage a massive, miraculous dinner party.

He had just received devastating news: his cousin, John the Baptist, had been brutally executed by the empire. The text tells us that Jesus withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. He was grieving. He was exhausted. He was looking for a moment of quiet, a breath of stillness away from the crushing demands of the crowds.

But the crowds followed him.

They heard where he was going, left their towns, and hurried along the shore to meet him. When Jesus stepped out of the boat, instead of feeling frustrated by the interruption, instead of letting his own exhaustion build a wall around his heart, the Gospel tells us he had compassion for them. He saw a deeper wilderness inside of them than the physical desert surrounding them.

My friends, we know that wilderness, don't we? The wilderness of being alone in a past paced world.

We might not be standing on the dusty shores of Galilee, but right here in Somerset County, along the banks of our own Kennebec River, we understand what it means to feel isolated, tired, and stretched thin.

We live in a culture that operates at a relentless, breakneck pace. We live in a world driven by a capitalistic, competitive mindset that constantly demands we do more, buy more, achieve more, and be more.

It is a system that turns life into an endless race, and it whispers a poisonous lie into our ears every single morning: *"There is never enough. You are never enough."*

This competitive culture creates a spiritual wilderness. It leaves us disconnected from our neighbors, bone-tired in our souls, and deeply anxious about our future.

When the disciples looked out at the five thousand hungry people as evening approached, their immediate reaction was born entirely out of this anxiety of not having enough.

They looked at the massive crowd, they looked at their tiny supply of five loaves and two fish, and they panicked. They went to Jesus and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

"Send them away to buy."

Notice the language of the disciples. It is the language of the marketplace. It is the language of transaction. Their solution to a human crisis was to outsource it to the economy. "Let them take care of themselves. Let them go buy what they need."

But Jesus fundamentally rejects that logic.

He looks at his panicked disciples, looks at the hungry crowd, and says something utterly radical: "They need not go away; **you** give them something to eat."

We look at this story and we focus almost entirely on the supernatural multiplication of the physical bread—and that is a beautiful, holy mystery.

But the deepest miracle of that afternoon was a communal shift

Jesus took a crowd of anxious, competing individuals and transformed them into a community of shared abundance. He took them out of the transactional market and invited them into the kingdom of God.

So we have to ask ourselves a vital question today.

In our fast-paced, high-efficiency, capitalist world—where our time, our energy, and our spirits are constantly devoured—what is the bread we are called to give to one another?

If Jesus said to us at all, All Saints, *"You give them something to eat,"* what is the food that will actually sustain our neighbors?

It isn't just physical food, though feeding the hungry remains our sacred duty. The bread our world is starving for today is the bread of Connection Dignity, and Unconditional Grace.

II. The Bread of Connection: Breaking the Rush

Let us look first at this first loaf: "the bread of connection".

Our modern culture treats time exactly like money.

We use terms like "spending time," "saving time," and "budgeting time." Because we view time as a scarce commodity, we are forced to constantly rush past one another.

We become hyper-efficient, laser-focused machines. We walk through the grocery store, we drive down Madison Avenue, we pump gas, and we treat the people around us not as souls made in the image of God, but as obstacles or milestones on our way to the next task.

Jesus did the exact opposite. Even in his deepest grief, he paused. He looked. He stayed.

To offer someone the bread of connection means making the conscious, counter-cultural decision to slow down. It means choosing to break the rush.

Imagine this:

You are sitting at a local coffee shop or at your desk. You have a massive to-do list, your phone is buzzing with text messages and work emails, and your brain is running a million miles an hour. Suddenly, an acquaintance, a fellow parishioner, or a neighbor stops by. They look visibly tired. They catch your eye and ask, “Hey... do you have a few minutes?”

Pause

In that exact moment, an internal war breaks out.

Everything inside our fast-paced, productivity-driven mindset screams: *No! Time is money. I am behind on my schedule. This person is an interruption to my goals.*

In that split second, we face a profound spiritual choice.

We can hand them a polite excuse — a smoke screen — or we can close the laptop, put the phone down, look them directly in the eye, and give them our absolute, unhurried attention.

That conversation might not change the world economy, but to the person sitting across from you, it is life-giving bread.

Deep listening — hearing someone's pain, joy, or loneliness without offering a quick, superficial fix, or trying to pivot back to yourself, — is one of the holiest gifts we can offer.

It is a radical act of love that says: *“Right now, you matter more than my productivity. You are more important than my schedule.”* We feed each other when we move away from efficiency and step into true human intimacy.

III. The Bread of Dignity: Breaking the Competition

The second loaf we must break together is “The Bread of Dignity”.

We live in a capitalistic framework that ranks human beings based entirely on production, wealth, and social status. It is a system that creates a rigid hierarchy of winners and losers.

If you are highly productive, if you possess a prestigious title, if your bank account is secure, the world bows to you and tells you that you are deeply valuable.

But if you fall behind, if you struggle with mental health, if you are underemployed, or if you are simply aging and can't produce like you used to, the world quickly renders you invisible. It steps over you.

But look at the text.

When Jesus looked at that massive crowd, he did not ask for their credentials. He didn't ask who had the most money to buy the provisions. He didn't separate them into those who contributed to society and those who didn't.

He commanded them all to sit down together on the green grass.

He leveled the playing field. Everyone was given an equal seat at the table.

We offer the bread of shared dignity when we actively fight against the competitive scorecard of our culture and affirm that human worth is an inherent, unearned gift from God.

Pause

Think about a typical, modern workplace or community group. Imagine an environment where everyone is quietly competing for recognition, trying to look the smartest, or pushing to get ahead.

Now, imagine a coworker in that space who is visibly drowning.

- Maybe they made a major, public mistake on a recent project.

- Maybe they are dealing with a quiet crisis at home—a sick child, a failing marriage, a heavy diagnosis—and because of that, their performance is slipping.

The unwritten rule of a Competitive Culture dictates that you distance yourself from them so you don't look bad by association, or worse, you use their slip-up to make yourself look better to the boss.

What does it look like to offer the bread of dignity in that broken space?

It looks like walking into their office, pulling up a chair, and saying, “I see you. I see that you are carrying a heavy load right now.

Conversation follows.

You say: “Your presence to this team, our family here at work, is valuable. It’s like with God: Our value is not defined by our deeds or your mistakes. We are loved unconditionally. That's how I see it. How can I help you carry this? What can I take off your plate?”

When we do that, we smash the competitive ladder.

We lift up those who are falling behind instead of using them as steps to climb higher. We remind our neighbors that they are beautifully human, not floating around without meaning.

IV. The Bread of Unconditional Love: Breaking the Scorecard

The final loaf Jesus provides in abundance is “The Bread of Unconditional Love”.

The Gospel writer notes a detail that should stagger us: “And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.”

Think about the math of the kingdom. Five loaves and two fish should have left everyone starving.

Instead, because of the boundless generosity of God, there was an immense surplus. God's grace is never rationed. It is never measured out in tiny, stingy portions based on what we deserve. It is poured out until it overflows the baskets.

Yet, we live under a cultural scorecard that tracks everything. We keep tight accounts of mistakes, slights, and debts.

We see this play out vividly in how we handle relationships.

Our world has largely adopted a "subscription model" for human connection.

You pay a fee of good behavior, validation, and agreeableness, and in return, you receive companionship. But the moment the other person makes a mistake, the moment they stop providing you with immediate happiness, or the moment they become inconvenient to love, our cultural instinct is to hit the button and cancel our subscription to them.

But God's grace does not operate on a subscription model. It does not require a monthly payment of flawless behavior.

To feed one another with the bread of grace means actively breaking the scorecard in our homes, our friendships, and our church.

It means offering forgiveness freely, even when it isn't earned or asked for. It means intentionally creating spaces where people can show up completely broken, mess up, and know that they will not be cast out.

When we offer this bread, we say to our spouses, our children, and our neighbors:

"You made a mistake.

You hurt me.

But my love for you is not canceled.

My commitment to you is not dependent on your performance. The table is still open, and there is still plenty of bread left over."

In a world that is exhausting itself trying to earn love, unconditional grace is the sweetest food imaginable.

V. Conclusion: Becoming the Bread

My brothers and sisters, as a small, faithful congregation here at All Saints, it is incredibly easy for us to look at our community and feel exactly like the disciples did.

We look at the massive spiritual hunger, the deep isolation, and the overwhelming economic pressures facing Somerset County, and we look at our own modest resources.

We might look at our pews on a Sunday morning and think, *"What are we among so many? We only have a few loaves and a couple of fish."*

But remember how the miracle actually started.

It did not start with a massive storehouse of food.

It started when a young boy was willing to take his small, ordinary lunch, place it directly into the hands of Jesus, and allow it to be broken and shared.

We do not need massive wealth, global influence, or limitless energy to change the culture of burnout around us. We just need to be willing to let Jesus use your ordinary, daily life.

As we leave this sacred space today and step back into the fast-paced, competitive world, let us refuse to let the frantic rhythm of society starve our souls.

- When the world tells you to rush, choose to stay present.
- When the world tells you to compete, choose to lift up dignity.
- When the world tells you to keep score, choose to pour out grace.

Let us go out this week and truly become bread. Let us listen deeply, honor completely, and love unconditionally, following the example of the One who broke himself so that we might all be filled.

Amen.