

**Proper 13B
John 6:24-35
Christ Church
2 August 2009**

“The difficulty in life is the choice.” This was the quotation that John, one of the school’s first grade teachers, had on his desk. After doing a bit of research, I discovered that the quotation is attributed to George Moore, one of the fathers of analytic philosophy who lived from 1873 – 1958.

From time to time, when consulting with John about one of his students, I found myself walking away pondering the quotation – the difficulty in life is the choice. Was the author thinking of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, “to be or not to be” the decision to live or die? Did he mean that life has so many options that it is difficult to choose just one? Did he mean making the difficult choices that are for one’s own good, but not necessarily the easiest choices?

I suspect that all of those meanings are somehow packed into that statement. Choosing life – making life-giving choices

– is a discipline. The word discipline, like disciple, comes from the Latin “discipulus.” Discipline carries several meanings: there is discipline as a branch of knowledge (academic discipline): discipline as a method of practice or rules of conduct: discipline as strength training.

In the Gospels Jesus’ disciples are ever learning the method of practice of following Him, his way of living – a method that, as he often reminds them – is going to make their lives better at least in the eternal sense. In John’s Gospel Jesus uses a metaphor that is both poetic and forceful to show them how crucial it is that they learn the discipline of following him. He uses the image of bread – conveying the necessity and urgency that his disciples follow The Way.

Jesus tells them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” For his disciples, this image of bread is potent. Bread is the very foundation of their nourishment; it is

basic to their existence. Without bread, they could not survive for very long.

I wonder -- what does bread mean to us? What does bread mean to people living all around the world today? Does the image of bread hold the same power now as it did to first century Jewish Christians? To find the answer, I went to the website, Bread for the World, a non-profit organization whose purpose is to eradicate world hunger. There I learned that 963 million people go hungry every day: 3 million children under the age of five die annually from the effects of starvation; 11.7 million children in the United States have to go without at least one meal a day due to their family's limited resources.

For these starving people, bread brings relief; it quells the raging hunger that burns in the night; it provides energy to act, to take care of the tasks of living. If Jesus were to tell these starving populations, that life in Him is as essential as bread, they would certainly get it. They would understand that a life apart from God is no life at all.

But, what does bread mean to us? I don't know about you, but I often find myself moving quickly through the bakery section of the Publix. But, most of my attempts at resisting those nice baguettes, or a package of White Mountain bread usually fail. Bread is not nearly as essential to our survival. We have so many other choices; so many other food items from which to choose. And, many of us who are always attempting to lose weight, try to avoid carbs. So, while we enjoy Jesus' lovely phrase, even feeling moved by it, "I am the bread of life," we may not easily comprehend just how serious and crucial the metaphor is.

Perhaps we, who until very recently, have been living in an over-stuffed economy, are in the greatest danger of starvation from the true bread of life, Christ Himself. For with the many choices before us, (consider the cereal aisle in the grocery store, the entertainment section of the newspaper, the number of channels on the cable), choosing the Bread of Life requires enormous discipline.

Curiously, hardship often narrows the scope of our choices -- someone we love becomes ill, the company gives us a pink slip. The discipline of choosing the Bread of Life, an ever strong and solid foundation in Christ, seems clearer. It often takes hardships to discover our real hunger – the hunger that can only be satisfied when we come into a deep and authentic relationship with the Beloved.

“The difficulty in life is the choice.” We have so many distractions: the entanglements of technology: the glitz of car commercials: the skin care products that will give new life to our wrinkled faces: the endless choice of activities at our disposal. We feed and feed our senses, while putting our souls at risk of starvation.

This morning, we will journey once again to the table. We will lift up our hands with reverence and great care – waiting to receive the Bread of Life. We do this so often that it can easily become a rote activity – going through the motions – something that we do on Sundays. But, it doesn't have to be.

Like the children around the world who are deprived of nourishment, we hunger for the sustenance of the soul. The deep nourishment that gives our lives meaning and purpose, that connects us to the living God – the nourishment that is as intimate as the food we eat. God desires to feed us with the Bread of His Presence – the Bread of Life in Christ so that, nourished by His grace, we find true life – a life that desires to share that Bread in all the starving world.