

**A Sermon for Lent 3, February 24, 2008**  
**Immanuel Episcopal Church, Hanover County**  
**by The Reverend David H. Knight, Interim Rector**

*In the name of God who is  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**T**his morning I want to speak about the kind of nourishment that lasts long after all other forms of nourishment have dissipated. In chapter 4:31, “Meanwhile the disciples were urging Jesus, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about... , my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.’”

We see Jesus sitting by the well. He is tired and thirsty, We hear his conversation with the woman who comes to draw water from the well. There follows the exchange between them about the living water. Her encounter with Jesus changes her life and she went and told others. So powerful was her witness, others believed. Even when he was tired, Jesus ministry changed the lives of others. This day was no different.

But now, enter the disciples. They see Jesus tired and thirsty. The conversation with the woman at the well has physically and emotionally exhausted him. They see that and they urge him to eat something. This is one of the few places in all of the Gospels where we hear of anyone urging Jesus to take care of himself. Perhaps they were concerned that he would burn himself out. They offered him food that they had brought with them from the town where they had apparently been shopping. But Jesus said to them, “Don't worry, I have food to eat that you do not know about.” At first, to use a phrase that was popular among young people several years ago, “they weren't pickin' up what he was puttin' down”, that is, they didn't understand. Jesus then helped them to see one of the profound, yet simple truths. It is, that you and I, as followers of the one who has sent us, have a purpose in life. That purpose sends you and me out there into the world to be among others who might benefit from those gifts we have. We discover the strange paradox that in reaching out to others, we are nourished. Just the other day, I found on the pages of a little book, The Blessings of Love, a compilation of the wisdom of mother Theresa, this particular insight. She writes; “God loves me. I'm not here just to fill a place... (God) has chosen me for a purpose. I know it. (God) will fulfill it if I don't put an obstacle in (the) way. (God) will not force me. God could have forced Our Lady. Jesus could have come ”just like that”... But God wanted Mary to say yes. It is the same with us. God doesn't force us, but wants us to say yes.”

I remember a colleague in my early days of parish ministry in a lovely New England town. I was serving in a parish perhaps just slightly larger than Immanuel. In New England, the Congregational churches dot the landscape in most towns. Norm Helm, the Congregational pastor down on West Main Street became a good friend and colleague to me. He had a few more years experience than I had and I learned a lot from him. I would notice among some of my other colleagues from time to time a fatigue, but Norm Helm seemed to be able to maintain an energy that was consistent. One day, I asked him, “How is it, Norm, that you seem to be able to maintain your energy while others around you seem to look as if they carried the weight of the world on their shoulders? I remember Norm's uncomplicated response to my question of some 35 years ago. “I say my prayers. I go out and make house calls. You see those people out there in the parish feed me.” Norm wasn't talking necessarily about feeding him from food on their tables. He was speaking about being fed by the people of

his parish in whose lives and whose faith, and yes, even whose struggles with life he found nourishment. Doing God's will as a faithful pastor of his flock nourished him. As his congregation came together in community and for prayer and for the Lord's Supper it was a vibrant welcoming community that, in turn, reached out to the town and beyond. He was nourished by saying yes to what God was calling him to do.

In your vocation, what is it that feeds you? What is it that gives you purpose. Those of you who may be retired, what is it that feeds you? Using our gifts as you and I strive to do what God is calling us to do nourishes us. Why is that? Is it because God nourishes us with the food we need to accomplish God sends us out to do? In today's Gospel Jesus reminds the disciples as he reminds us that we all have a purpose, and that God will ultimately nourish us to in the ways that will empower us and give us the sustained energy to do what God is calling us to do. Whatever is your vocation, there is something about that vocation which nourishes you. Try to identify what that might be, and then try as best you can to focus your energy upon that which nourishes you. You will find that others will be fed as well. God doesn't force you but wants, as Mother Theresa says, you to say yes.

It is at God's table, here together, that you and I receive strength. In our life here at Immanuel, we receive strength together as we come each week to this altar. Then, as well, in this parish where incredible food seems to show up on table when we gather, that food is a symbol of the nourishment we receive at the altar. As the vestry gathers to meet each month, for example, we have supper together. I've never seen this before, and I believe it makes a difference in how our meetings go. As a parish priest among you for this time during which you search for a new rector, I am fed by your lives, by your faith as well as by your journeys. As I move among you and visit in your homes, I am nourished. And on occasion such as this past week, I have tasted food on your table the likes of which there is no equal! Mercy.

This morning, as you come to God's table, may you find nourishment in the sacred meal prepared for us by the One who sends us out from this place. In this sacred meal, God nourishes us to face the week before us. This coming week, if you will, try to make some connection between being fed at this sacred meal this morning and something you discover that feeds you where you are during the coming days. There will be a connection. And you will know it when it happens.

The disciple said to Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something." Jesus said to them. "I have food to eat that you do not know about." Well, the fact is, you and I have come to know about that kind of food that will nourish us and that will last. So, come to God's table this morning with others around you. Come and eat, and together we will find the strength that will last. And then, go out into the duties of your life and say yes to what God may be calling you to do this week, knowing that you will be fed by the food that lasts. *Amen.*