

The Rev. Wayne Nicholson
St. John's Episcopal Church, Mount Pleasant
13th April, 2008
IV Easter, Evensong in Honor of Choral Scholars
1 John 2:18-29, Mark 6:30-44

"But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.'" (Mark 6:37)

We humans are fed in many ways.

Those of us who are hungry for knowledge can be fed by a good book, an engaging conversation, an inspiring lecture. Going back to school at a certain age. Keeping abreast of the news by listening to NPR on WCMU (the only station my radio seems to receive!).

Those of us who are thirsty for spiritual inspiration might turn to the Bible, to a respected spiritual director, to poetry by Rumi or William Blake, or –yes, this is true –to reading sermons, of all things, by Barbara Brown Taylor or Peter Gomes or Jim Wallis.

Those of us who hunger for justice might speak to our legislators. We might sign petitions or take part in a demonstration. We might take up a particular issue – poverty certainly comes to mind – and actually try to *do* something about it. Serving at a soup kitchen. Volunteering at a homeless shelter. Advocating for the marginalized.

Some of us, though, perhaps most of us, hunger and thirst for something that appeals to our senses. God has given us five – taste, touch, smell, sight, hearing.

Taste – the first snowflakes of winter. The first watermelon of summer, the first sun-warmed tomatoes from the garden with a slip of fresh basil and a hint of olive oil. And when we worship...the taste of holy bread and wine, the body and blood of our Lord.

The touch – our dog's fur coat. Or Mary Lou's. Real silk. The leather of a football in the fall. Of course, I don't know much about that, but I've heard... The touch of a stranger's hand when we pass the Peace – or that of a friend!

The smell of a campfire, of new-mown grass. Incense, the scent of the Easter lily and the beeswax candle.

The sight of beautiful things – the smile of your spouse, the sight of a newborn, the first daffodils of spring. Stained-glass windows, fabric artistically arranged,

light and shadow, this entire beautiful and spare design that is our parish church.

All of our senses come into play when we are truly attentive to God's magnificent and generous creation – and when we worship.

And then there's hearing. At every service we hear God's holy Word. We hear – and say -- the prayers of the church. Sometimes we hear a friend's name in the Prayers of the People – someone is sick, someone is alone, someone simply needs prayer. We hear the bell inviting us to stand, telling us that our service is about to begin – and we wait with anticipation to hear the first hymn.

Ah yes, you probably knew I'd get to music *somehow* from the story of the loaves and fishes!

Martin Luther wrote, "The devil does not stay where music is." Well, some of you parents of teenagers may think otherwise, but nevertheless – the music we hear in our church is meant to inspire our hearts, to add beauty to our liturgy, to encourage our restless souls, and to lift us up as on angels' wings as we praise God, thank God, and pray to God. Perhaps music is, as Thomas Carlyle said, "the speech of angels." It touches us in places we didn't know needed touch. It can caress the soul with gentle fingertips or shock our complacent hearts like a Michigan thunderclap. And for me, as for some of you, the music of our church touches my heart in a way that few words can.

We have been blessed by the presence of Katie, Kathryn, Zach, and Patrick, and by the choral scholars who have come before them. There's something particularly interesting about this quartet, though – somehow, they've become part of our community, our parish family. We actually *care* about them – and I do believe that they care about us.

They've been a challenge from time to time, to be sure. I will never forget one evening... They'd come to The Manse for dinner. We were sitting around the dining table in lively conversation. One of them – I won't embarrass her by naming her – suddenly, out of the blue, asked, "So, Father Wayne, how do you feel about premarital sex?"

Um... could we talk about Mozart or William Byrd or oh, by the way, how is your voice teacher treating you?

Ah, the spontaneity of the young.

Often before a service I'm running around tending to things – finding an acolyte, checking on the bulletins or stapling them, wondering if my stomach will growl during the Eucharistic Prayer – and how far that sound will travel. But when I hear our choir rehearse, I want to stop. Pay attention. Listen with heart and ear. And I utter a short prayer of thanks to God.

Jesus feed several thousand people with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. How many people have been fed spiritually by our choir and by our choral scholars? How many souls have been lifted up from a bad mood or a moment of sadness? How many hearts have been blessed?

Many thousand. Many thousand.

And so tonight, to our choir, our music director, and particularly to our Choral Scholars, I offer my personal thanks. Thank you for the many times you have cheered me, surprised me, challenged me, and graced the lives of all of us.

God has given you enormous talent.

Use it for good, use it for pleasure, use it for prayer and for inspiration.

Feed the thousands. Nourish them with the breath of angels.

God bless you all – may you live long, and prosper.

Amen.