

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: John 6:51-58
Date Preached: August 16, 2009

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

In Jesus' teaching about judgment day, an accusation is made that some neglected Jesus. They ask Jesus, "When did we see you hungry and failed to feed you? When did we see you in prison and fail to visit you? When did we fail to take care of you?"

Jesus answers by saying, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

In this teaching, Jesus makes it clear that he is among those considered the very least. He is among the poor. He is among the uneducated. He is among the sick. He is among those dying because they don't have access to basic medicines. He is among the orphans. He is among those suffering injustice.

Those of you who read my newsletter article this month may remember that I addressed our ELCA's One Campaign. At the heart of that campaign is support of the millennium development goals established by the United Nations in 2000. For your convenience they are reprinted in today's

announcements. I ask you to take a look at those for a moment. Look at them not just as goals to be achieved, but as places where Christ himself is present.

Two-thirds of the world's illiterate people are women. They can't read the words of Scripture that tell us of good news that Jesus Christ died for them.

15 million children world wide have lost one or both parents to AIDS. In developing countries one in ten children die before their fifth birthday. I wonder how they might hear Jesus teaching as is stated the Gospel of Matthew, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

There are countless other examples that highlight the suffering that many people face, primarily because of poverty. With those examples of problems are examples of what is happening through the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Since the adoption of these MDG's the global child mortality rates have decreased. In Uganda and Thailand the spread of HIV has been significantly reduced. Enrollment in schools is up in places like Tanzania, where debt relief has been granted.

The Millennium Development Goals are *not* unattainable wishes. In fact, we might look upon those goals as prayers. Such prayers might be to uplift those volunteers from various agencies who work with the poor. Such prayers might be for ourselves that we have the courage to bring these concerns before our elected officials. Current progress has been made with a tiny portion of the world's economic strength. We have the tools to end extreme hunger and poverty, what is needed is the political will to act.

Christians have a long history of serving in governments. We have a long history in raising our voices to motivate those with power to make changes in policies that affect the lives of millions. But this goes beyond political work and partisan divides.

This is about Jesus coming into the world. This is about Jesus saying to the church, I am the living bread from heaven. Come eat and drink. It is about proclaiming the good news of Jesus.

Jesus gives himself for the life of the world. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life. Jesus promise is to abide in those who eat my flesh and drink my blood. In the sacrament of Holy Communion, Jesus feeds us with his body and blood.

Yet we are fed for a purpose. That purpose is to be Christ's body in the world. The Spirit gathers the church together. The Spirit is at work in us to hear God's Word. The Spirit then leads us fed people out into the world in loving service with our neighbors. That is our response to God's gracious love for us; we extend this love in how we live.

Fed with the Gospel the church goes out to teach children and adults how to read. And those who are recently taught will be able to read for themselves that "God so love the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

There is ONE Word of God. It is a word that gives life now and the promise of eternal life to come. From believer to believer, one person to one person, lives are changed. Communities can be improved. Poverty can be addressed. That is the power of the Gospel to change lives in the world in which we live.

This is about being the body of Christ in the world. This is about living a holy life in such a way that we uplift the least in God's family. And in our prayers, in our serving and in our giving, we meet the faces and lives in whom Christ dwells and they meet Christ in our lives. AMEN.