“Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly”:
Sometimes it Takes a Miracle!  (John 6:9-21)

In the name of the God: Creating, Redeeming, Sanctifying.  Amen.
Bread.  The staff of life.  The disciples of Jesus clearly knew this.  The one who taught them to say “give us this day our daily bread” would also have offered a blessing, called the “motsi”, at the beginning of every Jewish “chabura”, or fellowship meal: “Blessed are you, Lord God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth”.  And they would also understand, and celebrate the feast of the unleavened bread, usually of unleavened barley flower--the food of the peasant class--which also reminded them of God’s later provision of manna in the desert during their 40-year long and winding road to the Promised Land.  And all of this would be, and still is, remembered every Passover, when Jews worldwide remember not only their own deliverance from slavery 3,000 years ago, but the continued outpouring of God’s Liberating Love for all who are poor and oppressed, regardless of ethnicity or religious faith.
So, as John tells it, the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.  Time, again, to break bread together.
Gandhi, a Hindu and deep admirer of Jesus and His way of Peace through nonviolence, put it this way: “There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.”
Let me share, then, a personal story that relates directly both to Gandhi’s observation, today’s Gospel, and today’s world.
In 1985, my nurse’s aide wages in Oakland were not enough for a real vacation.  I had learned, though from Sojourner’s magazine (a monthly copy of which is in our library) of an annual hunger walk from Santa Barbara to Tijuana, first to support families who scavenged in the garbage dumps outside Tijuana and, later, to support several orphanages and a vocational school run by a women’s religious order.  The walk itself was full of fun, with daily multifaith prayers and music, nightly programs highlighting the famous walks and marches of Gandhi, Dr. King, Cesar Chavez, and others, as our sore muscles were massaged by a local chiropractor and his wife.  In one case, an elderly Mexican-American woman from the Norwalk Evangelical Church insisted on washing our feet, giving thanks to God for us and encouraging us on our journey.
Later we walked into the LA basin and remembered Elijah’s feeding of 100 souls, read in this week’s Old Testament Lesson, as Temple Sinai provided two large school buses to take us over several busy freeways to spend a safe night in their courtyard on Wilshire Boulevard right downtown.

And when we finally got to Tijuana, we heard about the beginning years of the Los Ninos ministry, taking peanut butter sandwiches and milk to various sites in the Tijuana garbage dump: random act of kindness just to make sure the kids had at least one very simple meal for the day. One day, as they had made just enough sandwiches to fill the back of their van, the lines that began to surround them were huge! The staff then began to worry that a great disappointment, if not a riot, might be in the offing. But Noel, a lovely Quaker woman, prayerfully began passing out what sandwiches she had, prompting others to do the same. And then she just kept passing them out. One by one, the kids received a sandwich and a glass of milk, even though the staff clearly knew they hadn’t made enough to go around. (“But what are these, among so many people?”) But over an hour later, as the line finally finished, and as it looked like they had run out of milk, they realized that they had, in fact, given away just enough sandwiches to feed every child in line.

The following year, we walked again. This time they finished right at the border, hoping again to have a joyous fiesta, but by then the border patrol had become much more restrictive. So, instead, they held a communion service, right on the border, with a bilingual Roman Catholic Priest. Some of the nuns and the children then gathered on the other side in the hope that they, too, might receive the eucharist. So, instead of passing out peanut butter sandwiches, the celebrants instead passed the consecrated bread through the holes in the cyclone fence. All, again, had their fill. Paul says that Christ has broken down the wall of separation between us, while virtually every bible commentary notes the connection between the Early Christian eucharist and the feeding of five thousand, which appears in all four gospel accounts.

The following year I went to the orphanage. There we played with the kids, sharing card tricks and giving piggyback rides. As I hoisted the first boy onto my tall shoulders, I felt a wave of healing energy come over me! It was then that I began to realize that feeding the hungry, caring for orphans and widows, and sheltering the homeless are not just good acts of conscience toward those who are disadvantaged. Through the Grace of the
Holy Spirit, they are acts of justice which revealed to me the sacrament of Christ’s presence in our beautiful but very broken world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Real Presence of the body of Christ was as present to me in the touch, the freedom, and the joy of these children—as it is and can be for us at the altar each Sunday.

The following summer, my parents offered me to come with them to Mazatlan on a Club Med tour. After working another year in inner city Oakland as a hospice health aide, at first I found our hotel a wonderful blessing to quietly open my book of common prayer and recite the evening prayer book office as I heard the waves gently lapping on the shore just a few yards away.

But something within me kept stirring. Yes, this was beautiful, yes this was a wonderful gift my parents had given me. Yes, I could be, and was, thankful for a lovely time with them. But I remembered my experiences with Los Ninos. I felt alienated, and a bit guilty, for the affluenza, the white privilege, into which I had been born, which too often led to our feasting while too many others were forcibly fasting, or even dying of excruciating hunger, for no other reason than the land of their birth, the color of their skin, and the economy of a culture which still struggles to overcome centuries of colonial, neocolonial, and neo-liberal economics which brought prosperity to landed and well-educated elites, yet exploited and impoverished the peasants and the poor, the widow, and the orphan. Nevertheless, I gave thanks for the quiet presence of the ocean waves and went to sleep.

The following morning I went for a walk down the beach. Several miles south of this Club Med resort I came upon a path to a little village and a tiny storefront with a coke machine, a few tables, and a very modest menu. I ordered something in Spanish and the store owner complimented me on my accent and asked me where I had learned to speak. I first told him about our Speak Spanish Summer Seminar in Oakhurst (where Deacon Steve Skiffington now serves), and where I had, along with Rev. David Myers of St. Paul’s, learned Spanish. Then I told the store owner about our fundraising hunger walks with Los Ninos.

And then it happened. His eyes brightened, he looked straight at me, and said “You stay right here….I need to get someone and we’ll be right back”. So as I finished my coke, back he walked with a young man who stuck out his hand and greeted me, first in Spanish and then in english.
“Did you tell my uncle that you walked with Los Ninos?” he asked. “Yes, I said, “that’s pretty much the last time I got to use my Spanish.” “Well”, he said, “I want to tell you that I was one of those children you helped in the garbage dumps and I want to thank you for making it possible for me to go to school and to be where I am today.”

As the tears welled up for both of us, we continued a conversation for several minutes before I had to finally get back for the big fiesta night at Club Med. But I knew in my bones that I had again been fed and filled to overflowing by the Grace and Love of the God of Justice, made flesh in Jesus, who broke bread with the hungry, who cast out the demons of despair and destitution as well as those of affluenza and white privilege, and who still calls each of us and all of us to radical, faithful discipleship in and through and for the One who is, indeed, our very bread of life, even Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

May we all have the opportunity to taste and see that the Lord is good: The God of Justice and Mercy, the God of abundance even in the midst of injustice. Suffering, or deprivation: the God who breaks bread with the stranger and the poor so that all may know of Christ’s redeeming and abundant love. Thanks be to God!

--given July 29 at the 12:45pm Service at Trinity Cathedral by (transitional) Deacon Grant Bakewell