

John 6:24-35

6:24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

6:25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

6:26 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

6:27 Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

6:28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"

6:29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

6:30 So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?"

6:31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

6:32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

6:33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

6:34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Charge to New Deacons:

Last week, we read of that famous miracle – feeding the multitudes. In the wilderness, short on resources, surrounded by thousands of people, Jesus provides bread in abundance.

Jesus is SO efficient, and SO effective in this endeavor, that the crowds want to make him king. Who wouldn't want a ruler that puts a loaf on every plate and a chicken in every pot?

Jesus, of course, rejects this overture – he's not interested in traditional power grabs. And he flees across the lake. But the people are persistent. They see a cure, and their interest is sincere, and they venture to find out where he's gone off to. Because they want more of this bread. And they want his signs and wonders to confirm he's the prophet they are seeking.

But Jesus says, "Is that all you want? Yesterday's bread was just yesterday's bread – subsistence to get you to tomorrow. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't a bad thing. But there's much more that can feed you. I'm not talking about offering bread that sustains life. I'm talking about bread that invites you to live fully, to be satisfied, to quell your hunger

pangs tomorrow and all the tomorrows to follow. Well water is fine. And day-old baguettes are, too. But I'm here to offer you living water, and living bread, to experience the wildest and most unimaginable possibilities of God, and emboldened and elevated by such possibilities, to revel, to thrive, to transform in God's remarkable love and peace and grace and security.

I believe this passage is befitting of a deacon ordination Sunday. To me, Jesus is telling his disciples, and the crowds, and you and me as well, "Don't settle for okay." Life isn't intended to be blah. Life is intended to reflect all the vitality and goodness of our Creator. Therefore, the church-gathered, a rather large component of our spiritual life, isn't something we should say is, "okay." Okay may help us get by, okay may feed us from time to time, but okay will never keep us fed. Millbrook Baptist Church, as an expression of God's love, as a form of God's bread for the world, has got to be something that gives life.

And let me tell you something, Millbrook Baptist Church, the two people we are ordaining this morning, Bonnie Dixon and Marie Malpass, know what it is, and know inherently well what it is, to give life to God's people.

Bonnie and Marie, we, your church family, are elated, that each of you have chosen to serve us in the more formal capacity of deacon, and to share with us your love, your wisdom, and many spiritual gifts. As we prepare to ordain you this morning, we want to offer you words of affirmation and encouragement.

We'll start with Bonnie.

Some years ago, Bonnie preached a sermon about wilderness, specifically, that time when the Israelites were right in the middle of their adolescence, well beyond escaping the dangers of Pharaoh, but not yet ready to fully embrace the promise of a new land and a lasting covenant. They were deeply anxious about a lack of water. Uncertainty about present circumstances blinded them to God's history of provision, to God's presence in their present, and to God's promise of an abundant future. They were, just like us, a people on the way to being new people. Perhaps a people reckoning with the difference between manna and spiritual bread. With this in mind, Bonnie proclaims:

I don't know all of what being that kind of "new people" could mean for us in our church. I don't know all of what could happen if we truly lived with one eye on God standing on the rock and the other on the covenant community we're becoming. I don't know if it should mean a new mission church, a new building, a new partnership ministry in Zimbabwe or some other country, or a new kind of ministry here in Raleigh. Maybe it means taking the tools we have at hand – the courage and strength and commitment to creation and redemption that we've seen God use before in this place – and, with God standing there in front of us, striking a blow against a rock wall of oppression and injustice and participating in bringing forth a gushing stream of hope and life and community and love with those who live in our streets and sleep in our parks and shuffle each night into our shelters. Maybe it means making hard choices about resources, rethinking what's necessity and what's luxury, reordering our homes and our money and our lives as "people on the way." Maybe it means travelling to Zimbabwe or Sri Lanka, Gulfport or New Orleans, Appalachia or Jones County, Central Prison or Southeast Raleigh – to stand alongside those who've been neglected and abandoned. Whatever else it means,

it has to mean a new covenant, a resounding yes with our time and our resources and our gifts and our priorities; a yes to that elusive image of community – for all the people of God—that shimmers just beyond Sinai. Whatever else it means, it has to mean leaving behind who we were – the fears of lack, the bondage of too much, the codependence of slavery to consumerism and comfort, the constriction of privilege and power – and really, truly becoming a people on the way, a people absolutely confident that God is standing right there in front of us offering instruction and guidance and presence and co-creative power and covenant choice, inviting us to take the staff God has put into our hands and strike the rock so that water will come out of it, so that the people – all the people – may drink.

Bonnie, we know, we are a people on the way. It's our sincere hope that as we navigate the clumsiness of our not-yet-there, you will be a voice of guidance, of challenge, of comfort, and of imagination. It's our hope that you being you, will help us embody that covenant of us being us: God's beloved.

And now for Marie.

Marie Malpass has been active at Millbrook Baptist Church since 1978. And while that would certainly be enough time for wilderness wanderings, Marie has done anything but wander. Rather, Marie has been a wonder for Millbrook Baptist Church. She has cared for our little ones in the nursery. She, along with others in the Dorcas ministry, has woven countless tapestries of love: garments of healing and care. Marie has chaired our missions committee, ensuring our focus of love beyond these walls, be it in the hallways of Millbrook Elementary School, through meal programs and food drive to assist local families, or in aid

Charge to New Deacons

Bob Stillerman

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost, Deacon Ordination, 7/28/2024

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to global projects in Honduras and Zimbabwe. She takes seriously the call to care for our neighbors, and she's been a good steward of our funds, always seeking to amplify their impact. And while none of us have been looking, she's been quietly, and quite effectively organizing our children's Sunday School classrooms and supplies.

As generous as Marie has been in supporting the work of Millbrook, she's been even more generous in her gift of presence. Her easy, consistent, and always joyful way adds to the warmth of Wednesday suppers, the fellowship of the Heritage Class, and the Spirit of worship.

Marie, we know, we are a people on the way. It's our sincere hope that as we navigate the clumsiness of our not-yet-there, you will be a voice of guidance, of challenge, of comfort, and of imagination. It's our hope that you being you, will help us embody that covenant of us being us: God's beloved.

God for the gift of Bonnie Dixon and Marie Malpass, and the many ways they will enhance the ministries of Millbrook through their service on the diaconate, we say: "Thanks be to God!"