

Sermon by Rev. Lusmarina Campos Garcia
On John 6,1-15
Geneva, 26 July 2009

We were about 15.000 people. We walked together for about 10 kilometers. While we walked we sang, both religious and popular Brazilian songs. We shouted words speaking of hope, our hopes for our future as Brazilian citizens, as people who questioned the mechanisms of power installed in our country, the way of doing politics, the unjust legal system that protected latifundiários (the very large property holders), the large scale agro-business and other interests of the upper class. We were religious of different traditions and non-religious also. We were intellectuals and illiterate. We were poor, middle-class and a few rich people. We were all ages and skin colors. We were united, believing in a future that had already started as we marched and sang together. When we got to the plain, we sat and ate and celebrated. There were political speeches, artists doing music, poetry, drama or dance, and also a worship. Catholics and protestants led the worship. I was there, 'animating' the liturgy; singing alleluias and kyries with the multitude. We celebrated communion; hundreds of baskets of bread were given away. People themselves broke bread and shared with each other. 'The body of Christ'. Everybody ate from it, even those who were not religious. 'The Body of Christ', 'the Bread of Life' was not a limiting element, but an embracing presence. It was not only bread, but a proclamation of justice, peace, hope, our hope for the future, our strength for the present. Can you see how out of place it is for me that The Holy Supper is still a divisive issue among Christian churches? The Body of Christ eaten with tomatoes, rice, meat, manioc, beans, celeries, was a feast of unity. This event took place in 1988 and it was called Romaria da Terra, Land Pilgrimage.

I remembered this event when reading the gospel for this morning and considering what the Gospel story is speaking about. What reality is it pointing to? Which issues does it want to raise? Is it speaking about justice concerning food and its distribution? And what else?

The Gospel story is about food, fair access to it, and all what food represents. It is about justice and the ways it gets implemented or not. But besides that, it is about what nourishes life.

The multitude in the Gospel was following Jesus because of 'the signs that he was doing for the sick'. They were interested in health issues. It seems that the health system was not accessible to all and many were not cared for. And the fact that Jesus decided to give them food shows that they had little with them. Their access to food was precarious. This is the same multitude we talked about last Sunday - 'sheep without shepherd'. They were looking for health, food, words, concepts, understandings that made sense and that gave them strength and wisdom to face their present and their future. They were learning and at the same time sharing ways of having their lives nurtured. By following Jesus, they created the opportunity for the nourishment they needed. So, this is not a passive crowd, but an active one.

The multitude in Brazil was also active in searching for what nourished their lives but at the same time already making an option towards what would sustain their hope. By fighting for justice in terms of the land, its production, human rights, women rights, and many other social, economical and political rights, we were accessing the source of our vigor. When making pilgrimage together on a dusty road and at the same time singing, dancing, and combining spiritual, cultural and social values, we were choosing the food we wanted to eat.

The multitude from the Gospel together with the multitude in Brazil joins the many other multitudes that have marched on similar roads throughout the world. Multitudes against dictatorships or a given political system, against war or invasive military forces, against racial or other discriminatory systems; multitudes marching for peace, in favor of human rights, in favor of preserving people's lives. Have you been part of one of those multitudes? Which one do you recall at this moment? How long has it been since you have joined such a multitude?

Fighting for justice, participating in social, political and humanitarian processes are ways of nurturing life. But how do we do that as individuals, as family, as a small group of friends? What are the ways we touch the source of our strength, the nucleus of our hope, on a daily basis?

Is it by dancing, reading, writing, doing sports, singing, painting, gardening, helping others, laying in the sun at the lake, renovating an old house, surfing at the internet, cooking, discussing politics, religion, physics, doing computer stuff? What are the ways we touch the source of our strength, the nucleus of our hope, on a daily basis?

Psychiatrist Irvin Yalom says, 'the present moment is the one that exists for ever.' He also says, 'live in such a way to love the idea.' I combine these two phrases in order to say that no future will rescue our past if we don't live in a way that we love our lives. That doesn't mean that we will do only what we want, or that everything will take the form we wish, or that we are going to escape problems, stress or even chaos. No! But it means that we have to identify what gives us strength, what motivates us to keep going, what makes us laugh, what enforces our vitality, what builds up our energy, what revives our hope. And we have to create the opportunities to access or be accessed by those elements, daily.

It is interesting to note that in the Gospel story it is a boy who has the food from which the miracle unfolds. Rubem Alves, the Brazilian theologian, psychoanalyst, educator and philosopher has been insisting on the fact that adults have to learn again how to play. He says that adulthood takes from us the ability to enjoy life more freely because we lost the capacity to play. And he is convinced that if we don't turn to children and learn from them how they relate to life, we will not succeed in finding beauty, lightness, happiness, and definitely we will not be the people God wants us to be.

What nurtures us? How do we reach the sources from which our strength unfolds and our hope is born? What phrases are pushing inside us as we think about our world? Even if there is not a demonstration this afternoon, what bits of chant are seething in you seeking a better world? Would someone have a phrase they would like to share with us?

Our voices join the voices of an immense multitude -- a multitude that exists since immemorial times; a multitude that met Jesus in the Gospels, that spoke Portuguese and danced samba in Brazil, that marched in many other countries fighting for civil and political rights, a multitude asking for justice and peace, walking on many different roads and speaking many different languages; a multitude nurtured by the sense of being one, although an infinity; a multitude nourished by love -- love unfolding into words, healing, wisdom, presence, company, compassion, fish, bread. The Bread of Life after whom we shout, justice and peace. The Bread of Life that teaches us the way back to childhood. The Bread of Life that feeds us till we want no more.