

**Christ Episcopal Church**

**2 Emerson Street**

**East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855**

**The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost:**

**Proper 13 (B)**

**August 5, 2018**

**DRAFT**

**“A Very Hearty Meal”**

**8 AM and 10 AM Sermons**

**by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**The Holy Gospel according to**

**John 6:24-35**

On the next day, when the people who remained after the feeding of the five thousand saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” 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. 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.” Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” 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? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” 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. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” 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.”

Dear Lord, give us today our Holy Bread for today. Amen.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the Gospel of John does not contain the very important story of the Last Supper which is in all the other gospels, but John has instead the central and end portions of Chapter 6 that we begin reading today and then continue for the next three Sundays of August. These verses, from Verse 22 to 69, which we will read sequentially on each Sunday of August this year, are a brief homiletical reflection of how the church was probably celebrating the Eucharist in the eighth and ninth decades of the first century, when the Gospel of

John was being written down, a pattern of worship which we still follow today. For example, as you know we read Holy Scripture in our worship service--hence the reference today to the Old Testament story of Moses and manna in Verses 31 and 32; we eat the Holy Bread and drink the Holy Wine, the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, per Verses 27 to 58; and we hear in sermons the teachings of Jesus which are “words of eternal life”, verses we will hear on August 26 in Verse 68 in John, Chapter 6, a reference to the sermon at the Eucharistic

feast. So, this whole month of August we are seeing a brief and symbolic insight on what the world of the church and the worshipping Christian communities were doing in around 95 AD, the date most scholars say the Gospel according to John was first presented to the world. The oldest copy we have of any of the four Gospels is a tiny piece of the Gospel of John which has been dated to about 125 to 225 AD and is called the Rylands Library Papyrus P52, also known as the St John's fragment, is dated to around 125 to

possibly the early part of the Third Century. The front of this 2.5 inch by 3.5 inch papyrus snippet ( the ‘recto’ side) contains parts of seven lines from the Gospel of John 18:31–33, in Greek, and the back (‘verso’ side) contains parts of seven lines from Verses 37–38.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rylands\\_Library\\_Papyrus\\_P52](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rylands_Library_Papyrus_P52)

(The story of the Last Supper first appears in about 70 AD in Mark 14:22-25, copied around 85 AD in Matthew’s Gospel in Chapter 26:26-29; and embellished a bit by around 110 to 120

AD in Luke's Gospel in Chapter 22:15-20--Luke was the last Gospel account written, according to current biblical scholarship.)

Thus we realize that Jesus has been physically absent from Planet Earth for about seventy years when this Gospel according to John first appears, but the church has maintained its hope and inspiration through the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and preaching every Sunday week by week since his Resurrection and Ascension in around 26

AD. And during those nearly seventy years, the church observed the Holy Presence of Jesus in its Eucharistic celebrations. Christianity is in many ways a brand-new religion, although it leans heavily on the history of the worship traditions of the Temple and synagogue from more than a thousand years before Christ. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul noted that the Old Testament contains everything necessary for having a true faith in God and God's Son, and of course, that is all the first Christians had, the Old Testament

scrolls, and of course some oral traditions about Jesus. But we Twenty-first Century Christians have the great added benefit of having the stories of Jesus and the apostles read to us each Sunday in addition to the Old Testament and Psalms, portions of sacred scripture dating back two thousand years or more.

In dramatic form, Jesus announces to his disciples in today's Gospel that the Eucharist, the thanksgiving feast, is indeed a participation in his death and resurrection, quite starkly described as eating his flesh and drinking his blood,

as we say during the distribution of Holy Communion each Sunday. We consume very Holy Food, we hear very Holy Words from the Bible, and hopefully we hear something useful and interesting in the homilies, maybe even a bit Holy.

As the popular song goes, “What the world needs now is love, sweet love”, and we Christ believers find this love most securely and eternally in participating together in the Holy Eucharist each Sunday. When we miss it, we find ourselves starving for something more than work and shopping

and vacations. If we feel we are becoming hopeless or helpless, be sure to come back to Christ's Table every Week, rain or shine, warm or cold, or we will even come to your home to give you this Holy Food if you are unable to make the trip to 2 Emerson Street every Sunday. This is your regular Sunday destination.

Fellowship is great, but without the Holy Sustenance we hunger and thirst. Holy pancakes are not found at IHOP.

We pastors like to get people involved in church—spread the work, spread the glory, help others become

disciples. Jesus, however, in today's Gospel turns our self-conceived practices on their heads. It is not what we 'do' for Christ that matters as much as what we 'believe', Jesus says. Now, isn't that a non-starter. Don't we want everyone to have a part in the spread of the Gospel? And don't our churches represent Jesus to the world. So, when Jesus says to the crowd in answer to their question, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" that "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent." Jesus does not say, go out and

evangelize; Jesus does not say give ten percent before income tax; Jesus does not say set up a soup kitchen and feed the hungry, or shelter the homeless.

Jesus says “Believe in him whom God has sent.” What does that mean, “Believe in him whom God has sent”? Is believing enough?

Believing is the basis of everything in our lives. People believe in all sorts of things—people believe that families are most important; children are most important; my parents are most important; my brothers and sisters are

most important, my work is most important; my home is most important; my income is most important. How rarely do we stop to think that believing in Jesus Christ is what is important?

Was Jesus out of his mind, or did Jesus have something basic and true to tell us? When we believe, when we believe in Jesus Christ, all else will follow. We will experience miracles in our lives that were impossible. We will find opportunities in our lives that were impossible to predict. We will find fulfillment in our lives that we could

never have imagined. Believing puts us onto the blessings pathway. Do we believe and then God blesses us, or is it vice versa? Maybe God blesses us and then we believe. God so loved the world, not because it first believed in him, but God so loved the world that God gave us his Son; God did not ask for something first; God gave Someone first, God's Son, Jesus Christ. In Him are we to believe. "That whosoever believes in him will not perish but will have life eternal." What a gift, a gift that never ends, a gift that keeps on giving. And all

we have to do is ‘believe in him whom God has sent.’

The Christian life is to be one of belief. Jesus criticized his disciples, “Have you no faith? Have you no belief in me? Have you no vision that God can do anything through his Son Jesus Christ?

Let us re-examine our lives. Have we put belief in Jesus Christ as our Number One Priority?

Amen.

## Description:

Belief is the Number One Priority in our lives. From our belief, all the rest we do will follow. If we believe in Jesus Christ, Jesus says that is the work of God.

Tags:

God, Jesus, Christ, believe, John, gospel,  
Mark, Matthew, Luke, fragment,  
Eucharist, bread, wine, body, blood,  
papyrus, Last, Supper, Psalms, Moses,  
Old, Testament, resurrection, ascension

Addenda:

“Bread” is a symbol of food and our daily needs.

“Let me tell you about my kingdom. I am the bread of life! Feed on me! Follow me and you will never hunger and thirst again!” Many complained that his teaching was too difficult. The Greek word does not mean hard to understand but difficult to accept. Some respond with their feet and depart. The

congregation dramatically declines. In verse 66 Jesus turns to the remaining twelve and asks, “Will you also go away?”

Rejection! It would only get worse! Isaiah had foretold it. “He was despised, and he was rejected!” He came to his own and his own received him not. He had no place to lay his head. He died practically alone on a cross, suspended between heaven and earth, as if wanted by neither. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Rejection is still the most painful human experience. It comes in a variety of forms and faces. It can be real or imagined. Domestic violence and spousal abuse are the tragic results of rejection within families. Generations can reject each other as when a son puts his aging parents on the shelf. As when adults reject, with no effort to understand, a youth culture. Teenage suicide is up 95% since 1970 ~ the ultimate rejection of self. Some imagine themselves rejected by God and live

without hope. In the culture wars of our times marked by the loss of civility, people are too often rejected because of race, gender, age, sexuality, economic or social class.

Vocational rejection is rampant in our day. As corporate America downsizes, right-sizes, re-engineers, restructures, relocates, scores of skilled workers experience rejection striking a blow at their self-esteem.

Look at the lengths many people go to avoid rejection ~ to be accepted ~ to belong ~ to conform. An entire counter-culture of gangs, cults, dress codes, language, ethical behavior is spawned by the fear of rejection.

I love the story of the woman who celebrated her 102nd birthday, and when asked if there were any benefits living to such a ripe old age, she replied. “Yes, the absence of peer pressure.”

Rejection usually results in anger turned in on self or turned out on others. There is a destructive chain reaction in rejection that often moves from self-pity ~ nobody wants me ~ to sour grapes ~ I don't want anybody ~ and can go on to bitterness and sometimes vengeance. The millions of refugees in our world at this very minute are graphic reminders of the horrible reality of rejection.

<http://day1.org/836-rejection>

by the Rev. Dr. Elton Richards who is a retired Lutheran pastor that formerly

served St. John's Lutheran Church in Des Moines, IA.

Let me close with a story I read recently. It is good news for all who have experienced rejection. A family is out for a drive on a Sunday afternoon. It is a pleasant day as they leisurely motor along a country road. Suddenly the two children strapped in the back seat shout at the driver. “Daddy, Daddy, stop the car. There's a kitten back there on the side of the road.” The driver pretends not to hear. “Daddy, you must stop and

pick it up.” “No, I don't have to stop and pick it up.” “But Daddy, if you don't it will die.” “Well, then it will have to die. The last thing we need is another scrounge animal around the house. No more animals! We are not a zoo.” “But Daddy, are you going to just let it die?” “Quiet, children, and look at the beautiful scenery.” “Mommy, we never thought our Daddy could be so mean and cruel to let a little kitten die.” She turns to her husband and says, “Dear, I think we should go back.” He turns around in a huff and eventually pulls off on the

side of the road. “You kids stay in the car ~ I'll take a look.” He stoops to lift the little kitten. The mangy creature is just skin and bones, sore-eyed and full of fleas. When he reaches down to pick it up, with its last bit of energy the kitten bristles, baring tooth and claw. Ssst! He grabs the ingrate by the scruff of the neck and carries it back to the car. “Don't touch it he warns - it probably has leprosy.” Back home they go in silence. When they arrive the children give the kitten several baths, about a gallon of warm milk and then plead, “Can we let it

stay in the house just for tonight?  
Tomorrow we'll fix a place in the  
garage.” “Sure, the father mutters, be  
my guest, use my bedroom, I told you  
this place was a zoo.” They fix a  
comfortable bed fit for a queen. Several  
weeks pass. Then one day the father  
walks in, feels something rub against his  
leg, looks down and there is the cat. He  
reaches down carefully checking to see  
that no one is watching. When the cat  
sees his hand, it does not bare its claws  
and hiss, instead it arches its back to  
receive a caress. Is that the same cat?

No. It is not that same frightened, hurt, hissing creature on the side of the road. Of course not! And you know as well as I do what made the difference.

Long ago, there was another man who stretched out his hands to bless us and lift us. He did it for all who have been rejected ~ for all refugees by the roadside of life ~ for all who are hurt, hungry and ready to lash out.

Look at his face ~ look at the wounded hands ~ there are even holes ~ they are

bleeding. Such are the hands of the Savior ~ the hands of love and acceptance ~ extended this day to all who feel rejected.

<http://day1.org/836-rejection>

by the Rev. Dr. Elton Richards who is a retired Lutheran pastor that formerly served St. John's Lutheran Church in Des Moines, IA.

St. Augustine would often end a service of Holy Communion with the words, “Be what you eat.”

The Talmud tells a story about the importance of focusing upon heavenly matters rather than physical possessions. Rabbi Hanina was a very poor man, yet very faithful. One day, though, his wife, frustrated by living with such modest means, approached her husband and said, “Since you are known as a man whose prayers are heard by God, why don't you do something to alleviate our misery? Why don't you ask for some of our money back?” The rabbi replied, “But we are very rich.” “Yes,” his wife answered, “but why can't we make a few

withdrawals from heaven once in a while?” Feeling an obligation to respond to his wife's request, Rabbi Hanina began to pray. Right away his wish was granted as a hand came down from heaven and presented him with a table leg made of solid gold. The object was worth more money than they could ever spend during the rest of their lives. But that night the rabbi had a dream. He dreamed that he was in heaven and it came time for dinner. Everyone sat down at tables made of gold. In fact, they were all three-legged tables. Rabbi

Hanina then realized this his table kept toppling over because it had only two legs. When he awoke, he told his wife about the dream. Right away they both agreed he should pray to have the table leg returned to heaven. At once the hand came down from heaven and took it back.

<http://www.lectionaid.com/18-3/3QJ.html>

Jesus teaches that true happiness is only going to be found by believing in him. Some researchers now believe they

are able to measure happiness. They have reduced it down to an equation:  $P + 5E + 3H$ . In the equation, P stands for personal characteristics, (e.g., outlook on life, adaptability, and resilience); E stands for existence (e.g., health, friendships, and financial stability); and H stands for higher order (e.g., self-esteem, expectations, and ambitions). The equation was developed by two British researchers. They obtained their results by interviewing adults and asking them to choose five scenarios that made them more happy or less happy from a

list of 80 different situations. Women's happiness was most affected by sunny weather, being with family, and losing weight. Men experienced more happiness through romance, sex, hobbies, and victories by their favorite sports teams.

LectioAid, J. Adams

The work of believing is marvelously summed up in the well-known thirteenth century prayer by Richard of Chicester, “O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, may we know Thee more

clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly; day by day.”

Believing is something we do. In fact, it can be hard work. In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, there are 173 times that “believe” is used as an active verb, and there are only two times when the more passive word “belief” is employed.

We live in a culture where believing is being made constantly more and more difficult. In England, churches are not allowed to make a statement like “God

exists.” if they produce an advertisement for TV. A statement like that is forbidden from being broadcast because it is deemed to be an “unsubstantiated claim” according to the Independent Television Commission guidelines on advertising.

Although Jesus tells us not to labor for what perishes, Americans seem to be addicted to their work. While Americans take an average of 13 vacation days a year, most of the industrialized world is on break for a much longer time. Italy

tops the list with 42 days of vacation. They are followed by France with 37 days, Germany with 35, Brazil with 34, Britain with 28, and Canada with 26 days.

Everyone wants a free biscuit.

If I base my faith in Christ solely on his great deeds, then the absurdity of life will soon erode that foundation. Our creeds have only a comma for everything Jesus did between his birth and his death.

What does God want of us? This was their question. It is our question. We can be thankful that they put it and that they put it to Jesus. Hear now the Master's answer, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent" (John 6:29).

Let's be frank to say that the answer at first hearing strikes us as woefully dull and sadly detached from life. "What must we do?" they ask. And he answers, "Believe." What a letdown. He could have made the sale, but he blew it. The very kind of answer that keeps students

in the sack on Sunday mornings. The sort of vagueness that discredits whatever remains of the good name of religion. If only he had announced some deed of daring, called men to his side for some heroic stand. What shall we do? Name it, Lord! Clear the slums? Join the Peace Corps? Evangelize the city? How strange that sensitive as Jesus was to injustice and religious indifference, of which there was plenty in his day, he did not mount a crusade or launch a drive.

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent.”

By Ernest Campbell on The  
Protestant Hour

Far away in a lonely desert stands a water pump in the sand. You are a solitary traveler, and your canteen is empty, and you come upon that pump. Tied to it is a hand-written sign put there by some pilgrim. The sign reads; "I have buried a bottle of water to prime the pump. Don't drink any of it. Pour in half of it to wet the leather. Wait, and then pour in the rest. Then pump. The well has never gone dry, but the pump

must be primed to bring the water up.

Have faith, believe. When you are through drawing water, fill the bottle and bury it in the sand for the next traveler.”

Having come upon this pump in the desert with this sign and being out of water, what would you do? Would you dig the water bottle from the sand and drink from it, or will you believe and dare to trust and pour that water into the rusty pump? When you trust, you take a risk, both for yourself and for the next person who will pass that way.

To accept the life-giving bread of Jesus is to trust in God. It means we have the faith that God will provide all we need. It also means that by trusting in God we will be satisfied.

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/john-625-35-life-giving-bread-wagner/>

-by Dr. Keith Wagner

Give thanks for the people in your lives, the blessings you have each day. Give thanks for your daily bread. But rejoice and be glad for the destination is

so important too. You have been given a goal, a finish line, a destination to be with God and like God. You are God's child now and you will see God face-to-face. You have been promised eternal life. You are redeemed, so savor and enjoy your journey too.

-2014, by James D. Kegel

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/john-624-35-its-not-the-journey-its-the-destination-kegel/>

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-05>

God feeds billions daily, but we take notice only when we miss a meal.

-Dick Donovan, Sermon Writer

Guru Bhagwan Shree once observed,  
“If you (Americans) came face to face with God, you’d ask Him for a Chevrolet.”

We are always tempted to make too little of spiritual things. Some years ago

a comic strip showed a person carrying a sign that said, “The World Will End Tomorrow.” Right behind him, another person carried a sign saying, “Only One Shopping Day Left.”

What would you do if you knew that the world would end tomorrow? Would you spend time with your family? Would you kneel in prayer? Or would you shop till you drop? Don't answer too quickly. Just imagine the temptation to run up big bills that would never come due. We are

always tempted to make too little of the big things in life.

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There is a story, that is the stuff of legend, that developed around Alexander the Great. His horse ran away, and an unknown foot soldier ran after and caught Alexander the Great's horse! When he brought the animal back, he was ushered in to the great General's

presence, and Alexander rose to thank him and said:

“Thank you, Captain!”

With one word, the foot soldier was elevated to the rank of Captain! When the General said it, it was a reality. What's more, the foot soldier believed it! He went to the appropriate place and selected a new uniform and put it on. He then went to the tent compound where the officers stayed and selected a bunk!

The reality of his promotion was nothing until he accepted it and believed it and began to live it! We live within the promise of God's grace and goodness, but we have to accept it—live it—respond to it.

By Max Lucado, “He Still Moves  
Stones”

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Dick Donovan, SermonWriter

A story is told about a Jewish family who survived a Nazi death camp by observing the Sabbath religiously, faithfully, week in and week out. Despite their stringent conditions, each Sabbath they managed to find and light a candle, recall their Sabbath prayers, and pronounce the Sabbath blessings every week without fail in the midst of this camp of death. Their captors gave them each week barely enough food to survive—some water, stale bread, and a spoonful of lard. One week they found there was no candle to be had anywhere.

So, when it was time for the Sabbath meal the father took some of the lard, molded it around a sting from their tattered clothing, and lit the makeshift candle while leading his family in prayers and blessings. His son was enraged. When the prayers were over, he confronted his father: “How could you waste what little lard we have to make a candle?” His father answered: “Son, without food we can live for several days. Without hope, we can’t live for a single hour.”

**St. John's Episcopal Church**

**61 Broad Street**

**Elizabeth, New Jersey 07201**

**The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost:**

**Proper 13B**

**August 5, 2012**

**“Caring”**

**DRAFT**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus**

**Christ according to**

## **John 6:24-35**

Our Father, who is in heaven, please give us Your bread of life every day.

Amen.

As one of maybe a few million or many hundreds of thousands who are allergic to wheat, barley, oats, corn, and rye, I cannot eat bread—a tiny little piece for Communion, perhaps, will not make me sick, but with more than that I get a headache for two to three days. Most other people who cannot eat bread have Celiac Disease—bread causes them great

gastric distress because they cannot digest wheat bread or other breads. So now even the popular Domino's Pizza shops offer a form of 'gluten free' pizza as do perhaps ten percent of other pizza makers now, realizing they are missing a rather large segment of the population who cannot tolerate wheat. My particular allergy after it was diagnosed was solved by me by eating instead another ancient form of wheat, called 'spelt', which is possibly the 'original' 'fine wheat' of the Bible—I don't think bread makers want us to know that today

when we eat wheat bread of whatever bran content, that we are actually eating ‘genetically modified’ wheat, not modified by any chemical company, but modified over the recent centuries by selecting only the wheat plants that produce ‘smooth husk wheat’ that can be easily dehusked by the mechanical dehuskers of the wheat producers of the world. The original wheat was too ‘gnarly’ or had kernels with too rough a surface to be dehusked mechanically; and even today’s ‘non-processed’ wheat called ‘whole wheat’ still uses this

genetically modified variety of wheat, not the 'finest wheat' of the biblical record. We are lured by the color of our breads to think the darker varieties are so much better. True, their absorption into our blood of their breakdown product glucose is slower, and the tiny bit of husk is possibly a minor element to slightly lower cholesterol, but the butter or oils we put on our bread far overwhelms any real safety or nutritional value of 'dark breads'. And bread has the highest salt content of any of our common foods, very bad for those who

have high blood pressures. Also bread is what causes most of the well nourished to gain weight, the plague of much of Western society.

Yet bread for sure is the ‘staff of life,’ the key to life, for those who are starving—not the ‘normal’ North or South American or European, but those in lands with famine, and those of our own population who live with hunger very similar to that found in Third World Countries.

One of our Vestry members who is a social worker showed me that if someone

comes to us and wants food, if we offer bread and they refuse, we can determine that they are not actually starving. Very occasionally however we do find some who are starving right here in the middle of Elizabeth, New Jersey, and in most every town and city, but in general almost the entire population of the United States and Europe and most of South and Central America are not actually starving for bread. So, today's gospel topic of "the bread of life" is perhaps truly far more relevant to us than is physical bread. Yet we can never

forget those who are near starvation right on our very doorsteps. They do indeed need bread, but all of us require the bread of life that leads to fulfillment of all that God wants of us in this life, to receive the substance of the teaching of Christ and to believe on him as our Lord and Savior.

Most of what we consume other than orally, other than by mouth, does not lead to much of anything but perhaps ways of negotiating with others from our basket of plenty. We are compared by how much money we make, how many

professional degrees we have, how ‘blue’ is our ancestors’ blood, and our general influence on society. Those ‘trappings’ of life are what make the world of popular music and drama or even popular sports so exalted by our culture. We greatly admire the Olympic athletes, and indeed we can be assured that their work ethic is admirable, but winning a Gold, Silver, or Bronze medal means nothing on the scales of salvation. Weightiness on God’s scales is measured in terms of faith, good deeds, and especially love. How have we loved one

another? And particularly, how have we loved God? Those two factors are the essence of the law of God, Jesus said. Everything else will pass away, but our faith if it is real can never pass away.

This past Thursday evening I was at the Elizabeth federal immigration detention center once again to do a Bible study as I go to do each week there, but this Thursday we had a doubly large attendance, 83 detainees, filling the small indoor recreation room to almost overflowing, double the next highest attendance there ever. For more than a

decade the size of the group has been held to no more than 35 because experience showed that the Moslem groups that met there for prayer were too unruly beyond three dozen in that room; so we Christians were held to the same numbers because we could not be seen as being favored. I am guessing that now the numbers of Muslims being detained is far outnumbered by Christians because of the large “target audience” of Hispanics in our society who are undocumented. It is indeed sad to see so many Hispanic families being uprooted

now, but that seems to be the current immigration policy, perhaps in reaction to some of the outlandish state laws that not only permit ‘stop and frisk’ but also have recently added, ‘and check citizenship documentation.’

But the group who came Thursday night was particularly interested in the topic, “How Does God Guide Us,” one of the best of the Alpha Bible study series that was approved by the federal immigration service. The speaker of that series, Nicky Gumbel, has analyzed his thoughts of how God guides us into five

points: God guides through Commanding Scripture (the Bible), Compelling Spirit (the Holy Spirit), Council of the Saints (the church), Common Sense (reason), and Circumstantial Signs (providence or miracles), words which in English begin with the two letters, “C” and “S.” [not so in Spanish, however, but his theory is still firm and generally accepted.]

<http://acs.alpha.org/bioy/commentary/11>

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You will note that the ways God guides us does not include physical bread, but in fact every Alpha class includes food as

one of the prime elements of the format of this unique and powerful Bible study. Yet in the Elizabeth Detention Center, physical bread and nutritious food is supplied freely to every detainee, so the probability of a person being famished is not a real possibility inside that high security center with its many bars and locks and guards. But to see the eagerness of those in that Bible class to determine God's will for them in their lives is impressive and quite moving. In general most detainees are deported in less than a month now, but there have

been two detainees from Russia in our classes who have been in detention for more than two years—I don't understand the intricacies of their deportation cases, but sadly their lives have been pretty much prison lives for more than twenty-four months. One even told me he knew 'prison English,' he learned English in prison and in the various jails and detention centers where he has been housed in the United States for the past more than two years. Justice does not always work quickly, efficiently, or effectively always in our country, it

seems. (We witness the current news story about the five men who have been in prison in our area for over twenty years who were totally innocent.)

But Nicky Gumbel's five points of how God guides us are subsets or subdivisions of what we call 'the bread of life' that is Jesus Christ. Christ's bread of life is the way God leads our lives if we truly listen for God's guidance—we read our Bibles and learn daily from them; we listen to how the Holy Spirit is moving us to be loving and caring of others and ourselves; we attend

church at least once a week and speak and fellowship with other believers; we do use our heads, our thinking, to make good loving decisions in our lives and for the lives of others; and we praise God for the many miracles of our lives and in the lives of others. These sources of ‘bread’ will not make anyone ill but will be healing for all. For as we follow our Lord’s guidance we will find joy, peace, and fulfillment, better than the finest wheat bread that only fills us for a few hours. But let us always remember the poor. Amen.

