Seeing is not necessarily believing.

The difference, in my mind, is going deeper…interpreting the meaning of what we observe and, ideally, applying it. As Espiscopalians, we often refer to ourselves as discerning people. The foundation of our theology is three-fold: Scripture, Tradition and Reason. It is Reason that sets us apart.

We are encouraged to use our minds to interpret Scripture, to go deeper into what we see, asking ourselves “What is God saying to us in this passage?

In today’s gospel Jesus helps us to make the distinction between seeing and believing. It is the morning after, after the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. You may recall that Jesus took a boy’s meal of five loaves and two fish and fed the multitudes. When they finished their meal there were twelve baskets of food left over.

What they saw was the work of someone whom they believed to be a prophet, but just a prophet. There was a rabbinical rule that if a prophet, who was not yet recognized as such, should give a sign or wonder, he must be listened to: otherwise attention need not be given to him.

There was also the rabbinical teaching that the Messiah, when he came, would bring down manna from heaven, as we read this morning from Psalm 78:

“He rained down manna upon them to eat
and gave them grain from heaven.

So mortals ate the bread of angels;
He provided for them food enough.”

They “saw” the signs foretold in ancient Hebrew Scripture but they failed to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. However, he satisfied their need for bread, so they were eager to see him again.

These Galileans worked hard for their landowners, and in return, earned just enough to keep their bodies alive. If only they could have seen in
Jesus, the one who could give them the food which endures for eternal life. That’s the Good News of the gospel…

When finally Jesus points this out they asked, “What must we do?” He responded, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

We are called to believe in Jesus, and the things for which he stood:
. the way of life he taught us,
. the God whom he revealed to us,
. the grace and help he came to offer us,
. the victory which he made possible for the least likely of us.

Believe in Jesus and have the doors of the Kingdom of God flung open, with its infinite possibilities for us.

Imagine for a moment a man who is tired; and because he is tired, he is irritable and difficult to deal with. But give him a meal and in all likelihood, his behavior will change? Why? Because the strength that was in the food has become his strength.

So in Jesus there is that which feeds, which sustains, which restores spent vigor and exhausted energies, a strength we can make our strength, doing and being what, apart from him, we could not do and be. We are hungry today for “the bread of life,” and yet we seek the food which perishes.

It hurt Jesus when the multitudes were interested in him only insofar as through him they might find some easing of material difficulties. “You seek me only for the chance of loaves and fishes,” he said.

That is a disappointment which follows him today. Many reject religion all together. And then there are those who are only interested in the by-products of Christianity and not in Christianity itself. They seek a god who will be a judge and divider of things that will perish: more loaves and fishes, better homes, bigger bonuses, and newer toys. Let’s be honest, aren’t these the things we tend to hope for, pray for…I do. But are we seeking God’s spiritual gifts?
An old friend of mine, Carl Jung, in the first half of the twentieth century, wrote, “A clever European is convinced that religion and such things are good enough for the masses and for women, but are of little weight compared to economic and political affairs (Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 252). I believe that that statement is just as true today.

What must annoy Jesus the most about economic and political affairs is not that material things are so badly distributed, but rather that they are so grossly overvalued. In his standard of measurement they rank very low indeed. He must look in amazement at a world pressing and jostling like swine against their feeding trough, wasting life away for what to him are trifles at best.

Jesus tells us to “not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.” There are far bigger and more satisfying things within our reach than we have realized.

Beloved, we are living in difficult times. For most of us, these years will mark “our great depression.” The food that perishes is perishing before our very eyes. If we have not been touched by the downturn in the economy someone we know and love has or will be. This is more than a market correction, this is a redefinition of our material lives as we know it.

In these times we need to believe so that we can see God’s hand in our lives. Through prayer, Scripture, fellowship and service to others we deepen our faith, our beliefs. And by being active members of our parish community we support one another on our spiritual journeys.

And when you come forward to receive the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist, the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, come:
not for solace only, but for strength;
not for pardon only, but for renewal.
let the grace of the Sacrament make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name.

In that way, the Risen Lord will be known to us in the breaking of the break. For He is the bread of life and whoever comes to him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty.

Thanks be to God. Amen.
Exodus 16:2-4,9-15

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, `Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.' And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. The LORD spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, `At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

Psalm 78:1-25 Page 694, BCP

or

Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25 Page 696, BCP

Attendite, popule

1 Hear my teaching, O my people; *
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

2 I will open my mouth in a parable; *
I will declare the mysteries of ancient times.

3 That which we have heard and known, 
and what our forefathers have told us, *
we will not hide from their children.
We will recount to generations to come
the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the LORD, *
and the wonderful works he has done.

He gave his decrees to Jacob
and established a law for Israel, *
which he commanded them to teach their children;

That the generations to come might know,
and the children yet unborn; *
that they in their turn might tell it to their children;

So that they might put their trust in God, *
and not forget the deeds of God,
but keep his commandments;

And not be like their forefathers,
a stubborn and rebellious generation, *
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
and whose spirit was not faithful to God.

The people of Ephraim, armed with the bow, *
turned back in the day of battle;

They did not keep the covenant of God, *
and refused to walk in his law;

They forgot what he had done, *
and the wonders he had shown them.

He worked marvels in the sight of their forefathers, *
in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

He split open the sea and let them pass through; *
he made the waters stand up like walls.

He led them with a cloud by day, *
and all the night through with a glow of fire.

He split the hard rocks in the wilderness *
and gave them drink as from the great deep.

He brought streams out of the cliff, *
and the waters gushed out like rivers.

But they went on sinning against him, *
rebellling in the desert against the Most High.

They tested God in their hearts, *
demanding food for their craving.

They railed against God and said, *
"Can God set a table in the wilderness?

True, he struck the rock, the waters gushed out, and the gullies overflowed; *
but is he able to give bread
or to provide meat for his people?"
When the LORD heard this, he was full of wrath; * 
a fire was kindled against Jacob, 
and his anger mounted against Israel;

22 For they had no faith in God, * 
nor did they put their trust in his saving power.

23 So he commanded the clouds above * 
and opened the doors of heaven.

24 He rained down manna upon them to eat * 
and gave them grain from heaven.

25 So mortals ate the bread of angels; * 
he provided for them food enough.

The Epistle

Ephesians 4:17-25

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.

The Gospel

John 6:24-35

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."