

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Pentecost 11
August 5, 2018

Continuing Conversation John 6:24-35

One of my preaching professors at Seminary insisted that sermons have one clear straightforward idea that can be summarized in ten words or less. On more than a few Saturday afternoons I have forced myself to write a ten-word statement to pull a disorganized sermon together. I'm glad my seminary professor is not here this morning, because I haven't come close to boiling this text or this sermon down to one clear, simple idea.

When St. Augustine was asked a question about astrology, he answered that his main quarrel with the practice of astrology is not that it is superstitious, which it is, but, of course I'd say that I am an Aries. Augustine said that astrology is a lie because it claims to have simple answers for complicated questions. The great saint had such respect for the complexity of life that he had contempt for easy solutions. Most people love simple answers: The three causes of World War II; the four reasons Krispy Kreme donuts should be considered health food; the five reasons the White Sox won't be in the World Series this year. We are forever pinning things down, explaining things, fixing things in our minds. But faith doesn't work that way, and we shouldn't make it appear simpler than it is. Our job is not to explain God, Jesus or Christianity in ten words or less. Our calling as God's people is to be of a continuing conversation with God.

The stories of Jesus can't be summarized in succinct clear statements. In John 6:5-7, last Sunday's Gospel lesson, Jesus is in a huge crowd when he says to Philip, "How do we get food for all these people?" Philip answered him, "two hundred silver pieces wouldn't be enough to buy each one half a fish sandwich."

little boy's lunch is presented to illustrate the meagerness of their resources – five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus gives thanks and five thousand eat their fill. “Gather up the leftovers,” Jesus says, “so that even those who show up late can have a plate.” This peculiar story shouldn't be too simply explained or explained away.

Whatever happened the crowd is amazed. They follow Jesus around the Sea of Galilee, but not because they are anxious to hear what he has to say. They want another meal: Do what you did before. This time could you grill the fish in a lemon sauce? And sourdough bread would be nice.”

Jesus tells them not to work for food that spoils, but to pay attention to food that lasts forever. The connection between the bread they have eaten and eternity is unclear, to say the least, so they ask him to explain. says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever eats this bread will never die.” For two thousand years, ' followers have tried to make everything Jesus said seem more reasonable than it often sounds: “Eat my flesh and you will never die” is a strange thing to say. Who wouldn't be confused? What would our reaction have been? A street preacher shouts: “Step right up. Get your bread from heaven. Anyone who eats this will never die.” This is beyond Jimmy Swaggart sweating, Benny Hin crying, and Oral Roberts 900-foot Jesus. Jesus sounds like a snake oil salesman. The Jewish people complain, “ kind of nonsense is this? Jesus, what would your parents think if they heard this foolishness?” Jesus doesn't respond, but says something about being drawn to God, and again brings up the bread from heaven that leads to life. The conversation is hard to follow. Jesus uses phrases that need to be explained without explaining them.

What bothers the listeners the most is not the difficulty of understanding Jesus. bothers them most is Jesus' claim that they need his help. Jesus is

most offensive to those who think they can figure faith out on their own: “Isn’t this the carpenter whose family we’ve known for years? We’re better educated than Jesus.” If faith is about knowledge, that Jesus is unnecessary, because there is more than enough religion to argue about.

Today, faith is still mistakenly defined as a set of beliefs. But Jesus teaches that faith is an on-going search for meaning: our response to the way God pulls us towards God’s self. Faith is not an accomplishment, but a GIFT! Belief is not an achievement, but GRACE! Wee here today, not because we are intelligent, but because, in part, God has drawn us here. God subtly pulls us along, offering flashes of illumination along the dark path, placing within us the feeling that we are not alone, but not yet home.

We think we know where we’re going, but are we really sure? How lost are we? Where are we being drawn? Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd is in an interim period and you are probably asking the same question: Where are we going? That is exactly the right question to be asking. That is what an interim is all about. Who are we? What kind of a pastor do we need at this time in our church life in 2018 in this place called Prospect Heights?

God knows who your next pastor will be. That pastor doesn’t know it yet and it may take another year or longer before he discovers you and you discover him. That is what is so fascinating about the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit guides you and your future pastor along until you find each other. Until then all you need to be doing is praying for the spirit to do just that. Don't get ahead of yourselves. Your future pastor isn’t ready yet and neither are you. All you need to do now is pray and pray some more.

Faith is not certain, it is not firm, it is not unwavering knowledge. It is being in a conversation (Prayer) with God, being drawn to a God we do not fully understand. It is more like a novel than a textbook. You can read a math book, think about it, and work at it until you get it. "The square root of 225 is fifteen." But when you read a great novel you come out with your life changed, and your way of thinking transformed. At the end of a great novel, you don't say, "I got it!" because it's gotten you.

We need God, but we want to act like we don't. We want to pray, but we don't want to be hypocrites. We want to be independent, but we don't want to be alone. We want to belong, but we want to be ourselves. We believe but we are filled with unbelief.

God offers us the Bread of Life because we don't completely understand: "This is the Bread of Life that has come down from heaven that we can all be taught by." The Bread of Life is an on-going dialogue with God that becomes the best part of who we are. Eating this bread is accepting this conversation into our hearts. The Bread of Life is the willingness to listen to God, to be in dialogue with this often-difficult story of Christ. Our understanding or ability to explain it is not the point. The point is to be in the conversation, to listen carefully. And be drawn to faith and this table by the grace of God. This table here is the climax of the service today. We, like the people out in the desert are hungry for this. This table fills us to the brim so that we can once go out from here this week to be the people God has called us to be.

Take this text home with you. Read it again and again and ask yourself: "How is Jesus the Bread of my life?" And then look for God. Where will you find God this week. To find him, you have to be looking!!!