

Sermon August 18, 2024

[Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58]

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So, beginning with the Feeding of the 5,000 at the beginning of this sixth chapter of John's gospel, count all the way through the 69 verses. Our lectionary readings slice it into five "pieces of bread." Today's number four; you'll get the last slice next week, with Pastor Peterson.

In today's Gospel of John, Jesus offers nourishment, and this time the provisions are for a very long journey, indeed, the one to eternal life. Here, Jesus did not only say, "I have *come down* from heaven." He said, "I *am* the bread that came down from heaven," and "I *am* the bread of life. Eat my flesh and drink my blood."

Jesus is emphasizing his role as the giver of divine life to others. His is the invitation to eat bread which satisfies hunger forever. He's still correcting their truncated rendition about what he's about.

And the people listening to Jesus here are called by John "the Jews," and this is the demographic of folks in the community who are *not* attracted to him, and who openly oppose, and they'll have none of this. They argue among themselves, disputing and ridiculing his silly offer of miraculous food.

Research coming out of Yale University suggests that, believe it or not, the Internet is making humans believe they are smarter than they actually are. (Wasn't there a promise of it being "the great leveler"?) The behavior is called "invincible ignorance" –Google that when you're home (not now!); but it keeps one from development. A quote from their research:

"People tend to do what they know, and fail to do that which they have no conception of. In that way, ignorance profoundly channels the course to take in life, and "unknown unknowns" constitute a grand swath of everybody's field of ignorance. People often come up with answers to problems that are "okay," but are not the *best* solutions. The reason they don't come up with those solutions is that they are simply not aware of them. The average detective does not realize the clues he or she neglects. The mediocre doctor is not aware of the diagnostic possibilities or treatments never considered. The run-of-the-mill lawyer failed to recognize the winning legal argument that is out there somewhere. People fail to reach their potential as professionals, lovers, parents, and people, simply because they are not aware of the possible.

We fail to recognize that having a thought doesn't make our thinking "true."

The authors continue, just a little bit: "We tend to have convictions about many things, and to have opinions about almost everything else. We blind ourselves to the enormity of our ignorance."

And then cognitive scientists Sloane and Fernbock in their book, “The Knowledge Evolution” put it this way: “In general, people don’t appreciate how little we know. The tiniest bit of knowledge makes us feel like experts. Once we *feel* like an expert, we start *talking* like an expert.”

This crowd’s complaining only compounds their lack of understanding, and over time, increases their sense of rage. Oh, they murmured and grumbled that they knew his parents, which makes Jesus just a local boy acting crazy...

But Jesus ordered them to stop grousing and listen: *He’s got a teaching from God!* He made the same comparison that we saw last week, between manna that came down from heaven in the desert, and himself, who was the Living Bread that came down from heaven. Now, this is sustenance on a whole ‘nother level. And although it *was* given by God, manna is earthly food, meant to sustain earthly life, and those who ate it died, eventually. But Jesus is Living Bread, bread that sustains and transforms people through death. In fact, this bread is precisely Jesus’ dying flesh, given for the life of the alienated world, a world where death reigns. And Jesus, the Bread of Life, will enter into and go beyond all death, and those who eat this Bread of Life will die *and* rise, with Him.

Just concentrate on the deliberate kindness of God, feeding the people, giving them truth, teaching and pursuing them, again, and again, and again, in order to offer the greatest gift of all – God’s sacrificial love for us.

God follows us quietly and gently. How might we respond?

To start with, how about receiving Jesus’ flesh and blood in our Eucharistic celebration today?

Another way could be to bask in the generosity of God.

Also, simply slowing down; letting the love of God fill us.

And, be grateful.

God’s kindhearted love, which is also persistent, proves to be quite worth the teaching, to hear, and learn, and live into.

Here’s how Paul put it, one more time, in today’s Second Reading:

“Do not be foolish. Understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That’s the life your baptism empowers you to live, for your own good, for the good of others, and to the glory of God.

Amen.