

“Always and Only About Jesus”
+ 12 Pentecost B +
Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58
August 16, 2015

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!
The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for the day.

A wise seminary professor once told our class on preaching/homiletics that regardless of the occasion we should always “preach the text and keep the ‘main thing’ the Main Thing – the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” So, this is not a “Farewell Sermon” – though the complete discourse from John ends with people walking away from Jesus without so much as a, “So long, and thanks for all the fish (and bread).”

Up until today’s portion of John’s narration of a 2-4 day sermon, Jesus had them proverbially “eating out of His hand.” Literally, He’d fed 5000 people with loaves and fishes, then walked on water to still the storm that was threatening the lives of His disciples only to find Himself on another shore still stalked by many of those same 5000 people who were hoping He’d be their Bread King - glad to sit and listen in hopes the food and the power of God would keep on coming. Ah, but then things got more than a little strange because of the very words of the Gospel we just heard – so strange that ultimately John relates, “Because of (what Jesus had taught) many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

At one point a group of about 70 traveled with Jesus. After this “eat my flesh, drink my blood,” everyone, those who’d eaten the miracle food - locals, Pharisees, about to be formerly faithful followers were poking one another and saying things like, “Did you just hear what I think I heard?” likely rolling their eyes in disbelief and getting ready to go. Their high hopes that Messiah had come dashed in these words – the words of a madman. He said, “I Am the bread from heaven, and the bread I will give for the life of the world is my flesh... Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day... Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

Oh that’s “Crazy Talk!” Jesus saying He is God and that one must eat His flesh and drink His blood to “abide” in Him. I’ll get to the “abide” part later. But back to that moment – John tells us Jesus’ enemies at these disturbing words “disputed among themselves, saying ‘How can this man give us His flesh to eat?’” Isn’t it interesting that the same words we are rather “ho-

hum” about having often heard them started a fight? That’s the word John used: *machomai*. A *machomai* is the kind of fight that is more of a brawl than just an argument or "dispute." Right in the middle of Jesus’ sermon, no less!

Bread from heaven – I can hear many of you thinking – “Isn’t this about the Lord’s Supper – what’s the big deal?” Not to disappoint you, many have asserted Jesus is talking about the Lord’s Supper but Martin Luther argued that these verses aren’t about the Eucharist at all, but rather the Eucharist – The Lord’s Supper is about these verses. What Jesus says here is embarrassingly intimate; difficult to explain – ended up with the Romans accusing the followers of The Way – Jesus of being cannibals. Still, we dare not blunt what Jesus plainly said.

To eat someone’s flesh and to drink his blood is an image of war, where a warrior becomes so consumed in the heat of battle that blood flows and body parts fly. Which is what, pardon the pun, makes the Christian faith in general and Jesus’ words in particular pretty hard to swallow. We are not following a nice fat and happy Buddha seeking enlightenment. We are following someone we helped kill; someone whose “flesh and blood” our sins – your sins and mine destroyed and our needs devoured; someone who came down from heaven “to give life to the world” and what He got in return was death, death at the hands of those whom He had come to saved.

What Jesus was saying was of course, a foreshadowing of His death, but He was also saying that the only way to have life, real life, authentic and eternal life is through Him – to receive Him as God – the Great I AM – and through His sacrifice to come to the feast that lasts for eternity – and more than that – to know that you “abide” in Him as you humbly receive Jesus, the incredible, incomprehensible “I AM the Bread from Heaven.”

I said I’d get back to that word, “abide.” That verb (*meno*) occurs 40 times in the Gospel of John and 29 times in John’s letters. The verb means to remain, stay, abide, live, dwell, last, endure, and continue in while the noun (*mone*) is a dwelling place, room or home (another favorite word of John’s) Jesus wants us to receive Him and to abide – find our home, our resting/dwelling place in Him. Jesus longs for us to feast on the Word and Sacraments – to be active in the family of faith, regular in worship – not as a “must do” but drawn always to Him - the Living Word. To be in the Word where the Holy Spirit can instruct, guide and help us to grow more fully into all that God has in mind for us as members of the Body of Christ.

The people that day weren't having any of that - didn't want this strange Jesus – they didn't want to “abide” with this madman who'd fed them. Perhaps, as it is for many to this day they were afraid of where walking by faith would lead them – so they simply stopped following. They walked away. God Incarnate – right there in front of them – but they wouldn't have Him. He told Him He was better than the miracle manna that fed their forbearers in the wilderness – that they could feast on Him forever – clear on into heaven, but that didn't suit their taste. They couldn't see that all of life and eternity – all of it was, is and ever shall be about Jesus.

As pastor here for 12+ years, Mary a teacher and aide for 15 years at Central Lutheran, and Fran – sharing her considerable gifts of music so humbly and beautifully – well, in truth, all we've ever been about in our vocations was to give glory, honor and praise to God. In the particular call you gave me to be your pastor you asked me, for a while, to “be Jesus in your midst.” That is a rare privilege, now ending – but not really. This congregation called me to “be Jesus” in all kinds of situations in your lives, teaching – preaching here, at CA, chapels at CLS and countless times proclaiming from this pulpit and presiding at the altar to consecrate the elements for the Lord's Supper, to baptize and announce God's forgiveness.

But, let's be real – it is never about the person who answers the call of a congregation - it is always and only about Jesus. The ministry of the Body of Christ – each of us gifted with faith in baptism to live our lives abiding in Jesus individually and together - is shown to the world in how we “love one another” in word and in deed. That is why Paul told the Ephesians and us to “be careful how (we) live.” He didn't mean “watch your step,” or “do better” or “mind your manners.” Paul, a prisoner for the Gospel, better than any of us knew the world was a dangerous place where even God's people can slip off the straight and narrow because trials assail assault and the sorrows of sin hurt us. What Paul meant was for you and for me is to be full of care, be mindful, remember, hold fast in your hearts, that in Jesus – abiding in Jesus your life and mine every day have meaning and purpose because He lives within us, as part of our very being, as surely as the food you eat becomes a part of you. You, each of you, we together are redeemed, loved, saved, and guided, down to our very last cell.

Why? Because Jesus came from heaven to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves – He saved us – He loved/loves us in the midst of our very imperfect and messy lives and chooses to dwell – to abide – to be “at home” with us. No matter who fills the organ bench, teaches the little children or preaches from this pulpit the church is God’s church and only exists as a place for us to be nurtured and to grow in faith, to show and share the love of Jesus Who is always there for us, with us and in us—flesh and blood, body and soul, forever. Amen.

Now may our ever-living, ever-loving God who gave His Son as living bread for the sake of the world, draw near to us and fill us with His presence and His peace that we may be strengthened and sustained to serve the world he came to save wherever and however God leads.