

Sermon Proper 14
Year B
August 8, 2021
CCM

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

We continue this morning with our meditations on John Chapter 6 and the very challenging conversation Jesus is having with those who have been drawn to him there on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. You will remember that they have taken part in the feeding of the five thousand with just five barley loaves and two fish. They are intrigued, and as is so often the case with human nature, they want more.

But in last week's reading, Jesus has turned the tables on them. He asks them why it is that all they really desire is have their bellies filled one more time when he has come to offer the world so much more. And he concluded with same verse that begins this morning's reading: "I am the bread of life." It is the first of Jesus' "I am" sayings, like "I am the light of the world" and "I am the Good Shepherd" which is John's way of signaling to us that the deepest truth about Jesus is being revealed. In other words, when we hear Jesus say, "I am" in John's Gospel, we know that divine wisdom, the very wisdom of God, is about to be revealed.

Of course, this is also the moment when the conflict starts.

The Jews began to complain about Jesus. "He didn't come from heaven. We know all about him. He's Mary and Joseph's boy." They're not buying any notion that "he has come down from heaven" for that would be, according to their way of thinking, outright blasphemy. Plus, literally speaking, he certainly doesn't look like bread! No, we don't want to hear anything along those lines. We just want bread to eat, just like that manna our ancestors received out there in the wilderness. That's enough for us.

To which Jesus says, stop your grumbling and pay attention! What happened to your ancestors? Sure they ate the manna...but then they died. I am here on behalf of God, my father, to offer you so much more. I am the living bread that has come from heaven. And here's the kicker: Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, for the bread I am giving to all of you is my very flesh. He is offering them a choice. Live according to the world's precepts and die. Or believe in God's wisdom incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth and receive eternal life.

My friends, let's chew on that for a moment this morning.

And let's be very clear. The conflict in the moment is not some tribal conflict nor is this about antisemitism. Each person listening to these words in that moment, and yes, right here and right now, is immediately drawn into an internal conflict. Can Jesus really be the bread that leads to eternal life? Do we really by faith ingest this truth? Or frankly, even as we listen, are we quietly looking to be fed elsewhere?

You see, the the conflict is not so much about Jesus. It is much more about our own frames of reference. We have a tendency to build a box for God and we are much more comfortable when God stays in that box that we have constructed. But the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

have no interest in staying in any of these boxes, not one of them. God refuses to be limited by us or by our imperfect constructs. God in Christ has come to reveal so much more, a new and much larger life that we cannot begin to imagine. Stop snacking on manna. I am the bread of life. If you really want to know who God is and what God has in mind for the world, come, listen, learn, and eat.

And here's another realization that should cause us to pause this morning, and perhaps even tremble a bit. When you and I live only within our personal point of reference, when we refuse to think outside the box and open ourselves to the divine possibility that there is so much more going on than we can imagine, we are destined to live hungry and empty lives. We are reduced to subsisting on manna rather than opening ourselves to all that the bread of life offers to us. And no matter how much manna we might collect and eat during the course of our earthly lives, frankly it will never fully satisfy. Remember. There will be no trailer attached to the hearse. We are dust and to dust we shall return. Manna might fill our bellies but it will never save our souls.

Yes, I know. Sometimes we limit ourselves. Sometimes our fears and anxieties and our past behaviors get in the way and leave us feeling as if we are unworthy of this bread of life. We box ourselves in with guilt and when Jesus offers us the bread of life, we hesitate and then make the excuse that we're not really hungry.

But that is not how God sees it. God so loved the world that He sent His only son. That includes you and me. The table of God has been set and there is a place there for each and everyone of us. There is nothing, not our limited perspectives, nor past sins, nor any amount of guilt, that prevents us from now receiving the bread of life. God invites us, right here and right now, to step outside of these boxes we construct for ourselves and eat this bread that leads to eternal life, into a new of believing, of thinking, into a whole new way of being.

God knows that we are hungry. That's why God has sent his Son. Our conflicts, our restlessness, our deep longings, our desire to be loved and then to love accordingly, need more than manna. Jesus wants us to know today that he is the bread of life. Whoever comes to him will never be hungry, and whoever believes him will never be thirsty. We are being offered holy bread this morning to fill our deepest hunger. This is the gift of God and it is for all the children of God.

Amen.