

Jesus, As Ordinary as Bread. *Based on: John 6, 35-41 Message for Aug 12.18*

This is year B, the second of the 3 years in our lectionary cycle of readings, and every year B when summer comes around we have a 5 week series of readings from John's gospel about Jesus as the bread of life. The series begins with the story of the loaves and fishes, which, if you were in church two weeks ago you would have heard. We interrupted the series last week by focusing instead on the Transfiguration story, but we're now back on track with the 'bread discourses' as they are known.

Today Jesus reminds those listening to him that he is the bread of life. Whoever comes to him will never be hungry or thirsty. We know, because we have heard this so often, that Jesus is talking about more than filling tummies and satisfying thirst, like he did in his feeding of the 5,000. He is talking about slaking spiritual hunger and thirst—that is satisfying our deepest spiritual needs and desires, our need to know God, to have a relationship with our Creator, to understand that life is more, is deeper than what we can see, hear, feel and touch. We know that there is more to life than the physical, and our souls ache for more.

Jesus is trying to tell his listeners that he can do more than fill their bodies with fish and bread, he can fulfill their spiritual hunger—he is the bread that came down from heaven. “Whoa there, hold on one cotton-pickin’-minute.”--say the Jewish leaders—that’s what is meant when John refers to the Jews—the Jewish leadership of the synagogue, the members of the religious establishment. They complain bitterly, they call Jesus out on this ‘I am the bread of heaven’ line: “Who does this guy think he is? We know who you are, where you came from, we know your dad, Joseph the carpenter and we know your mom, so, how can you be from heaven?”

And, you know, I can see where they're coming from with this. It would be like one of your neighbour's kids – one that you've known from childhood, telling you he was God's son. It would, at the very least give, you pause! A little bit like when one of the kids you knew growing up who was a real hellion as a teenager becomes a priest or a minister—it takes a bit of getting used to, and then there will always be some people will never accept that one as a clergy person. They are stuck in a way of thinking, and can't or won't consider that there is a new way of regarding this person, the situation. That's what was happening with these Jewish leaders, their minds were closed, there was no way they could see or would even consider Jesus as anything but the son of a carpenter. So Jesus tells them, that no one can come to him unless drawn by God, the very one who sent Jesus. Now, this can be a tricky statement to understand, it is NOT meant as a statement of exclusion, that God only calls certain people to believe in Jesus, and those who are called are the special ones, and the rest, well, you're off to hell in a hand basket. This is NOT what this statement means. We know that because throughout the gospel we read about how inclusionary Jesus is: he healed women, children and Gentiles and those who thought to be out of their minds. He ministered to those who were down and out, the outcasts of society, those whom others believed unworthy. We need to consider statements like this in the larger context of the full gospel, the fullness of Christ's ministry, not just as an isolated statement which can be then simply interpreted to make a single point. No one can come to Jesus unless drawn by the Father tells us that we don't come to faith all on our own, we are drawn into it by God. It is not by our own efforts, not by our own works—like behaving properly and being righteous that we earn our way into Jesus' good

books. Faith doesn't come to us that way, that's not how we come to believe in Jesus. These are expressions of living out our faith. Faith is a free gift, a gift, a grace given us by God.

We all have a piece of God within us, that spark of God within us, our souls, that which gives our bodies life. This is the part of us that yearns, that hungers and thirsts to reconnect, to be in a loving relationship with our Creator, our Father/Mother God. I think of it kind of like a homing beacon, you know, like in those older sci-fi movies, where the space ships are out there exploring the galaxies, and they have a homing beacon that always brings them back to the mother ship. Our connection with God is kind of like that homing beacon; it's always on, God is always there, calling us, drawing to God in Christ. But in our busy lives, in our desires to do and go our own way, we can get pretty far away from the mother ship, which weakens the beacon's call, as it were, especially if we're not listening for it, and so it's easy to miss God's calling us. Some, like the Jews in our story for today refuse to listen to it, or try to shut down the beacon, or even take it off the control panel and put it in the closet, and then close the door. But the beacon's always on, pulsing away, even when we choose not to see or hear it. Closing the door on God doesn't mean God's not still there!

"I am the bread of life", Jesus told his listeners. He reminds them that God provided for them in the past—"Remember the time of Moses, remember the manna that kept your ancestors alive when there was no other food in the desert?" That was God, God was there in the manna, providing them with their daily bread, keeping them alive until they reached the promised land. God saved them from perishing in that desert. "Now", Jesus says, "believe that I too came from God, I came as a man, as one of you, I came to feed your souls, to bring you back to the ways of the Creator, I am the bread of eternal life." Bread of all things; bread is so very ordinary!

We expect something as huge and awesome as the Lord God Almighty, creator of the universe and all that is in it, to be extra-ordinary, so God sometimes can become so massive and incredible as to be unattainable to us mere humans. So in glory to God, we build special buildings with fancy windows, and big towers, design worship full of pomp and circumstance with clergy in special clothes, and choirs to sing. Please do not misunderstand me, I love these things, they are beautiful ways in which we glorify and worship God, but these things can also become barriers for us too. God becomes so very special, which God is of course, but so beyond us to be seemingly inaccessible. It's like we put God on a pedestal in a special building, where we have to come to find God. And we are very dutiful in our caring for God's building; it is one way that we show how we love God. But when we leave the building, we leave God behind on the pedestal in the building—a bit like putting the homing beacon behind the closed door of the closet. So we don't hear the beacon in our everyday lives, we don't hear what God is really calling us to, as individuals and as a church community, we don't hear Jesus' call to walk with him. We lose touch with the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives.

So, God became incarnate, God came to God's people as an ordinary man from the neighbourhood, as Jesus, the son of the carpenter. Those Jewish leaders, and many others, couldn't see it, wouldn't believe it. Jesus came to bring the ways of God back to God's people, to bring them back to God. Jesus is the bread of life, he tells us. Can you get any more common than bread? Or more necessary to our existence than bread? A basic universal sustenance, regardless of what kind of grain it's made from,

every culture around the world has some type of bread. Give us today our daily bread. Lord, draw us to Jesus each day. Draw us into the ordinary ways God comes to us in our daily life: in the beauty of the world that's all around us, in a hug, a card in the mail, a feeling of encouragement when we're praying for help when ill, depressed or grieving, lovelorn or spiritually lost. God comes to us in the beauty of the natural world around us, the scriptures, in the music and prayers of our worship, in the bread and wine of holy communion, the love of neighbours, family and friends, a hug or touching hand, the reassurance of belonging to a church community. God in all God's wonder and majesty, is still so simple and ordinary. It is truly one of the miracles of God. It is in God's very ability to come to us in simple everyday ways that we are drawn into the glory of God, into God's love, and God's reassurance, God's grace.

Jesus told all who would listen: "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day." (vs 44) God calls us all, God wants nothing more for us than to be drawn into God's loving, saving grace. Doesn't matter what you've done, or failed to do, how unworthy you feel, the love of God in Christ Jesus is for all. So take a moment, listen with new ears, see with new eyes; experience Jesus in the ordinary things of life. God's homing beacon is always on, always present, always calling us into the gracious love of the Lord. Amen.