

Homily for Sunday, Aug 4, 2024

Exodus 16:2-4,9-15, Psalm 78:23-29, Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6: 24-35: Food for Life

Each Gospel writer was telling the story of Jesus to a different audience. So, they focused their writing on those actions of Jesus, encounters with different groups of people, and His teachings that helped them convey their message to their audience. But thanks to these four varied accounts of Jesus' life, we are blessed a much fuller picture of who Jesus was.

In writing **his** account of Jesus' life, John's earnest desire was that the people reading his narrative – and this includes us today - would be left in no doubt that Jesus was the Son of God. All His power came from God. He came to bring people into a new relationship with God through His life, His death and His resurrection. Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus wasn't just a messenger, He was/is the Message.

From the beginning of his narrative, John puts an emphasis on the divine origin and authority of Jesus. For example: in Chap 5, (I am paraphrasing) when Jesus is talking to a large crowd, he says The Father has given all judgement to the Son. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life. There are many more sayings like this.

Then, John selected some miracles of Jesus, from turning water into fine wine, healing the sick, including the daughter of a royal official who was healed from a distance, and

now, as we read last week, the feeding of 5000 people from a few loaves and fishes, to be **signs** of the divine authority and power of Jesus.

“I can do nothing on my own”, Jesus also says in Chap 5. This is his testament to the divine source of his power.

This past week, I sat and read through the whole Gospel of John in one sitting. It is very wonderful. It's a different experience to read a whole book instead of the short passages that are in our Lectionary. I recommend it. But as a new Christian in college, I was given a Bible and told to read this book and, honestly, I loved the language and imagery of John, but I didn't get it. I understood the gift of salvation, but not the gift of new life. What did that look like? It's as you walk with Jesus that hunger to know Him better increases and you find yourself wanting more of the bread and water, the new life, that only He can give. At least, this is what has been true for me.

So, in our passage for today, we find some of the crowd that we met last week, fervently searching for Jesus. They had witnessed his healing miracles, received a miraculous free lunch, and are eager to find Jesus again. Why? Not because they had really paid attention to his message. Jesus understands their true motivation. They are drawn to him for the physical and material blessings he can provide. He is the perfect benefactor. They did not understand the deeper significance of his miracles – perhaps were not interested in knowing more, they were just hoping their needs were going to be met. I am not saying they were being superficial, because they were probably poor and genuinely in need of assistance.

But Jesus challenges them to recognize their spiritual hunger as a much greater need than any physical hunger they experience, and only He as the Son of God can satisfy that spiritual hunger.

“Work not for the food that perishes but the food that endures for eternal life that I will give you” he says (v27). Earlier, John had told the story the Samaritan women at the well (Chap 4). When Jesus offered her living water, eternal water, at first, she thought, Great, no more daily treks to the well. But then she understood. This crowd was slower to understand. To me ,they seemed a bit snarky bringing up Moses. It was, as if to say, he fed the Israelites in the desert for 40 years. You have only done it once!!! But Jesus just keeps pointing them to the fact that the provision really came from God, who cares for our needs, both physical and, more importantly spiritual.

I think that this passage challenges us to reflect on our own motivations for seeking Jesus. At times, we, too, **can** follow him for our own short-term benefit and gratification. We want God’s help to live better lives, but our focus is mostly self-serving. And we want God to respond in the way that we expect and on our timeline. When that’s not happening, we may start to doubt that God cares or worst, if he even exists. We want him to be our benefactor but he wants us to see Him as the risen Lord. We want him to follow us around but he calls us to become his disciples.

When the people listen to Jesus and begin to recognize that he is from God, that he has divine authority, they respond: Prove It. They want a sign!

Jesus' response to the people could have been: Hello. I fed 5000 people yesterday! I healed the sick. Aren't these signs enough? Apparently not. Perhaps because they were yesterday.

Further, sometimes God **may** respond to our particular need, but in a way that we don't recognize, at least, not at first. In our reading from Exodus, when the Israelites first saw the manna in the desert, they didn't know what it was. This weird stuff was God's answer to their prayer for bread! Not what they expected.

This passage was a bit of a wakeup call for me this past week. I'm not sure if I want to laugh at myself or despair! Just please don't judge me for being very human! As many of you know, no doubt many of you know, I have had persistent back problems with a fair amount of pain for the last three years. Miserable, exhausting, couldn't walk well! I have prayed and prayed that this would not be my thorn in the flesh forever and, of course, I've seen all kinds of doctors and therapists. Then, out of the blue, a retired physical therapist from Chicago, the brother of a friend, was watching me limping around and suggested a different form of therapy. He even found someone in CT who was trained in this technique and willing to work with me. Now, here I stand, three months later, pain free and getting more and more functional every week. For me, this has been an absolute answer to prayer. My miracle. But, like the Israelites in the desert, it's not exactly what I was hoping for (the therapy is hard work and expensive), but, hey, it's working. Thank you thank you God.

So here is my confession: There are more bigger problems that I have prayed about, for a long time. One is something important. And I am praying constantly for our new PIC to appear. A few weeks ago I was depressed about the lack of response from God and

started questioning, Why is nothing happening? Are you actually there, God? And, wait for it, I need a sign!!! Are you with me? Hello!!!!

Later, when I started preparing this homily. I cringed! Sorry Lord. Not quite Peter when the cock crowed but close! I realized my question was wrong. Are you with me – that's the crowd talking. It should have been, am I with you God?

So what do I /we need to do better then? if we want our lives to change so that we are not constantly being tossed up and down. Love and praise one day, doubt and anxiety the next. And at times, depending on our circumstances, reduced to even doubting God's presence in our lives?

When I was first reading this passage, the line that I stumbled over was verse 29.

The crowd were prepared to work to earn God's favor but Jesus responds This is the work of God, that you **believe in Him whom he has sent.**

Just believe in Jesus – that seems a very passive response. But no. Belief in Jesus is not a passive acknowledgement of his story, an intellectual acceptance of the doctrines and creeds, it is seeking active living faith that God wants to give to us. If we are willing to take a deep dive into this, it is transformative. It changes our priorities, our actions, and our hearts and it leads us to live lives that reflect the love grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that as this passage ends with one of the wonderful “**I am**” statement. I am the Bread of Life. There are seven I am statements in John. In Greek I , the first-person singular, is ego. I looked at the list in Greek: ego, ego... down the page. So

where is your ego? is your ego centered around your self-serving needs or is it Jesus – is He at the center of your being?

I think it's hard to undertake this transformation on our own and be on a consistent journey of growth, we need each other's support and help - which is why we need a community of believers. People to share with, to pray with and to learn from. I think this is what Paul is talking about in our reading from Ephesians. He is appealing to them to be grounded and strong in the faith together, doing God's work together.

He writes: the gifts he gave were for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

A couple of final thoughts:

An old hymn came to mind that we sang in the Baptist church I attended for a time in England. It's called "O for a closer walk with thee". I found it in our hymnal.

The last verse says: "So shall my walk be close with God, calm and serene my frame, so purer light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb. (William Cowper poet, 1700s) Calm and serene frame that doesn't mask, but authentically expresses what's going on, on the inside.

Finally, what about a sign? Where can we look when seeking Jesus? Jesus points to his own presence among us, in the Eucharist, in the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation. Here, we is where we meet Jesus, inviting us to believe in life, to trust in a nurturing God as we go through the deserts of our lives, to believe that with God, all things are possible

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus, the true bread from Heaven. Help us to grow in our belief in Him, to trust in His sacrifice and to surrender to His Lordship.

Guide us as we cultivate a deeper relationship with Him and live out our faith in our daily lives.

Satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst and transform us by Your grace.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

