

August 12, 2018 Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B
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Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

John 6:35, 41-51

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the sixth chapter.
Glory to you, O Lord.

³⁵Jesus said to [the crowd,] “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ⁴¹Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴²They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” ⁴³Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Despite constant evidence and reminders
that even the most intelligent and insightful person in the world
only ever gets a narrow window
onto the sweeping horizon that is Truth...
we like to feel like we know what’s going on.

We also like other people to know we know what's going on.

I imagine it is one of God's great frustrations
that so many of us want to appear to understand so much more
than we actually do or can.

If we could begin each day ready to learn...
to test the reach of our knowledge...to listen...really listen...
to see how others have experienced the world...
and to be honest about what we do not fully know...
well...maybe the kingdom could be brought a bit more to bear
than our belligerent insistence on being experts in everything allows,
even though we know an infinitesimal amount of what can be known.

One of my favorite and most ridiculous examples
of this need to seem knowledgeable

comes from an excellent story from the Moth Radio Hour
that contains this brief side story.

(Unrelatedly...I won't give away much of the main story here...

but if you want to spend 17 minutes and 14 seconds of your life
really, really well...google something like

"The Moth Radio Hour – All At Sea" or just "Moth British Bathtub"
sometime today:

<https://themoth.org/radio-hour/bathtub-sailor-seamstress-spy>

During his story, the storyteller, Tim FitzHighum,

a British comedian and author,

talks about accidentally ending up on the phone
with an admiral in the British Royal Navy.

Being somewhat out of his depth...

but needing to ask the admiral a favor, as it turns out...

he begins the conversation as the only sailor in his life, a great-uncle,

told him he should...if he ever found himself
speaking to a member of the navy...by asking the question,
“How are your futtocks, old man?”

He asked that question...and the admiral responded:

“At their furthest reach dear boy, at their furthest reach.”

Of course, this answer was as unintelligible to Tim
as the original question had been.

So he had to go back to the great uncle to ask for an explanation.

The uncle confirmed...this was in fact the correct response to the question.
But Tim still didn't have the slightest idea what the question...
or the answer...actually meant.

So he asked.

And his great uncle replied,

“Well, that's the thing, Tim. Nobody actually knows.”

I have a hypothesis...that many more of our conversations than we realize
are like the one Tim had with the admiral.

The main difference being,

sometimes I think we assume we understand both what we are saying
and how people respond....

when perhaps we are missing each other's meanings completely.

All of that is to say...

that humanity hasn't changed much in a few thousand years...

and so when people heard Jesus claiming to be the Bread of Life...

the Son of Humanity...

this massive and mysterious thing

they could not possibly comprehend...

they go back to what they think they know...

to try to shield themselves from what is beyond their reach.

“Hold on. Isn't this Jesus? Joe's boy?”

We know where he came from. We know his parents.

What kind of story is he trying to tell?

Come down from heaven?

What's he trying to pull?"

We like our explanations small and mechanical and visible.

Make it multi-faceted...nebulous...or strange...and we often retreat.

Or we learn to.

This is why children are so important...

and maybe why Jesus was drawn to children, cared for them...

and even showed us that the kingdom of heaven

is more open to them than us.

Somehow, they can see the poetry of the cross and the water of baptism...

the hidden victory dance of God in the crucifixion.

I don't understand how...but I have heard them tell the story

better than I know how.

So when Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life come down from heaven,"

The adults can't accept it. They can't take it in.

Incidentally, this is why we permit very young children to receive communion,
even though the church didn't for awhile.

We eventually started to act as though you had to understand communion
before you could receive it.

But if communion was for those who understood...

well...church would take about 15 fewer minutes each week.

The sixth chapter of John shows us that.

The people who surrounded Jesus

couldn't understand what he was saying about the Bread of Life...

and while we have the benefit of hindsight,

I'm not sure we can understand it that much better.

But...Jesus doesn't say we have to understand.

He says we can eat and live.

He doesn't say a darn word about understanding.

I don't have to know how the molecules and nutrients
get broken down out of the food I eat
so that my body can make them into the fuel
that allows my life to continue.

Can you imagine?

Having to understand that before it could happen?

We'd all be dead in no time.

And so it is with the bread that has come down from heaven.

We don't have to know what a futtock is...

or how Jesus can come from Nazareth and heaven at the same time.

We can simply hold out our hands and receive the Bread that gives us Life.

And every minute after, we can listen and look

for the Truth behind the mystery of the life we receive.

But thanks be to God, we are offered that life first.

Because if it is was up to us...we might pretend to understand...

but we know we wouldn't.

And we could find a way to starve to death looking really smart about it...

but that wouldn't change the outcome.

Jesus comes to us and declares himself the Bread that gives us Life.

Whether we can wrap our minds around that or not...

we are invited to the table where we can come and eat and live.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.