

August 19, 2018 Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
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Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

John 6:51-58

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

[Jesus said,] ⁵¹“I 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.”

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

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

So...if you are on a low-carb diet, these weeks might be getting rough...and not just because of how hard it is to avoid bread in this carb-filled world in which we live. It's here in church, too, these days. We are on week four out of five, where Jesus tries to show us and tell us what it means that he is the Bread of Life.

I sometimes wonder if the composers of the lectionary put these five weeks together, sitting with the sixth chapter of John, to confound us...not because they thought after five weeks we might really get it...but to try to show us what

it might have been like to be with Jesus back then...I don't think they were trying to give us time to get it. I think they were trying to make sure we felt the full frustration of knowing we can't.

Because that Jesus' true presence...his body and blood...is the meal that is at the center of our life, quite literally in many ways...and yet, it is not something that we will make rational sense of...not after one week or five weeks or ever.

Today, we have come to a threshold of sorts. Maybe worship is always a threshold...but this Rally Day is a particular kind of threshold. We stand at the beginning of a new year – for those who have begun school...and a new church program year of reflecting on how we might use our gifts and passions to serve God in our lives and as a congregation...

We also stand at the very beginning...the very entrance...to life in Christ...in the church...with Kent and Caroline...and their family...as they come to the waters of Baptism today. It is a time of beginnings. And at these thresholds, God comes close...whether they are momentous...like death and rebirth...or the first week of kindergarten...or the beginning of a journey to a new country or new chapter of life...or when they are less momentous...as we continue to go through our daily routine of coming and going...and new backpacks and shiny new supplies don't mark our days so much anymore.

And God is present to all of those passages...

God comes close in the singularly huge life-changing way God does when we are baptized...and then...God comes close again and again and again and again. I believe it was St. Ambrose who called Holy Communion "the repeatable part of Baptism." In the days of the third century, when he lived, the newly baptized would rarely have been small children...and they would have been ushered in from the baptistery at Easter dawn...literally Easter (the one day the ancient church baptized)...and literally dawn (after keeping vigil all night until the first light of the day of resurrection warmed the horizon). They would have been ushered in to the waiting assembly...still dripping wet...and brought to the table of Holy Communion for the first time...the meal to which they would return for a lifetime...

I wonder, sometimes, what it was like for them...what sort of transformation they experienced in that dramatic kind of baptism and entry into the community's life of faith.

Does baptism change us so completely in ways we can perceive? Did it for them?

Is it like a switch that flips? Do I not know because my baptism happened before I could remember what it felt like to be who I was before I was brought through that water? Is that how this transformation works?

I've recently been pulled into a rabbit hole of youtube videos of people putting on EnChroma glasses for the first time. If you've never heard of them, these are glasses that were basically discovered accidentally...but that refract light in just the right way that they basically give people with color vision deficiencies the ability to see color.

To put it more simply...they basically cure colorblindness...instantly.

And there are videos...and compilations of videos...where you can watch men (they are mostly men)...putting on these glasses for the first time...and basically going to pieces.

If you want something heartwarming to watch on your phone whilst ugly-crying at the beauty of the world...google "EnChroma glasses" or "colorblind glasses" and click through some links.

There is one video where a man is standing outside...by a lake...looking at...well...everything...as if the whole world is new...and as he scans around...his gaze stops on the landscaping...and he walks towards a bush of flowers...and points...and asks the friend who is filming... "Is that purple?"

Because he has never seen it before.

Sometimes I wonder if the kingdom of heaven is like that...If we enter it and suddenly see a world of color and light...and love and justice...that had been there all along...just beyond our view.

Sometimes we use the phrase “colorblind” as if it is something to strive for... “I don’t see color,” some people say. I wonder how that sounds to people who truly live without seeing color in the ways many of us can. And I also wonder what it would look like not to strive to have the world fuse into uniform shades of brown and beige...but rather...to wish for it to emerge refracted even more...into hues we don’t even have names for yet...

Maybe that is what baptismal living is about. And maybe we need to come back again...week after week...to remember again what purple really looks like...what justice and love really taste like...and so Jesus offers himself again and again so we can remember how the world really is.

Of course, being given new ways of seeing and understanding the world may also mean that we are able to perceive those less beautiful and joyful things we could ignore before. But now we can’t. Baptismal living means seeing purple and love and laughter...and also the gangrene of suffering and oppression and pain. It means the ones we often make invisible...are visible again...and we can see their suffering. We are given God’s eyes and ears and heart. Sometimes that is beautiful...and sometimes it hurts. But...hopefully...it always moves us into action...to respond.

Both things come together. We feel the depths of beauty...and the thin air of struggle. And because learning to live with beauty and struggle is the work of a lifetime...we have this table to return to. We have Jesus with us for the journey. Because we have been changed...but there is so much work to do.

Today Kent and Caroline join those who are given this work. They join us in the baptismal work of seeing the truth...in its beauty and its horror. They join us in the work of being the body of Christ in this world...of being the very thing we receive at Christ’s table.

May we all be strengthened as they join us today...and may they be made strong, especially...all of us as coworkers in the kingdom...fellow members of the body...because there is so much great good work to do.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.