

I am the bread of life
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John 6:24-35

We are in the second week of a series of teachings from the Gospel of John about bread. For some reason the lectionary jumps from the Gospel of Mark our assigned gospel for year B and puts in several weeks of John. As we examine these passages it is critical to remember that Jesus in Mark is portrayed as more human, growing in knowledge. In John he knows who he is from the start and is depicted as far more divine.

Last week was the feeding of the 5000 and I spoke of the important of being present as Jesus was as he fed the crowd. This week Jesus declares that he is the bread of life, the bread sent from God to the world. Next week there will be those those who question whether Jesus is this bread of life. You see the difference from Mark's theology? In Mark Jesus tells everyone not to say who he is.

I was intending to head in a very different direction in fact I was planning on Ephesians, but two weeks ago Richard Rohr wrote about the Eucharist for most of the week. He wrote something that in the midst of all of his great theology about the Eucharist, which I love he said, "We changed bread more than people, it seems to me. We emphasized the priest as the "transformer" instead of the people as the transformed. We made "Real Presence" into a doctrine (which has its very good meaning!), but we seldom taught people how to be *really present*. When you are really present, you will experience the Real Presence for yourself."¹ This idea of focusing on what happens with bread instead of what happens with us is what grabbed my attention.

Yes there is something special about the bread. Ask anyone who has given another the bread at the altar rail. Especially when you go down the line from person to person. "The body of Christ the bread of heaven" carefully putting it into each person's hand. Deacon Dana used to say that when we eat the bread we kiss Jesus and I have always loved that image. However if nothing in you changes then something is missing.

With the bread and the wine we take Jesus into ourselves. Jesus becomes a part of our very being. Enters if you will our very DNA. How is a mystery and I am fine with that, but it happens. Then filled with Jesus we are sent into the world to share Jesus. This is the key piece.

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<http://email.cac.org/t/ViewEmail/d/C2D00447E17B63E72540EF23F30FEDED/BBC62F1EC1C6D196C68C6A341B5D209E>

The disciples ask Jesus, ““What must we do to perform the works of God?” He answers them by simply telling them that they need to believe in him. No he is not going to give them signs although I must admit if they cannot figure out that Jesus is somebody special by now, I have to wonder what proof would make a difference. Our passage ends with I am the bread of life. Whomever believes in me will never be hungry.”

Everything we do as a parish, everything I do as a priest should be about changing lives. This is also a theme our Presiding Bishop has been mentioning. I have heard him say several times if we are not changing people, changing lives then we might as well close up shop. I remember reading a letter several years ago a letter from Bill Hybles the founder of the Willowcreek Church. This huge mega church has sponsored numerous other churches and puts on a major on-line conference every summer. He wrote to the many churches that follow him and he said something like, “My friends we are failing. Yes our buildings are packed with people, but we are not changing them. I don’t see any difference in the people even though they come every week.” In effect he was saying that they are not filled with Jesus, the bread of life.

Following Jesus is about allowing God to change us, to fill us with the bread of life and changed. Then we are told to go and make a difference in the world. Sometimes seems so hard to be a faithful Christian and can sometimes reach the point of why bother. A member sent me a link to an article that talked about why people don’t come to church. It wasn’t scientific by any stretch of the imagination but there were some good points. In part people do not think it matters whether they attend church or not because they don’t see any change in those who attend.

Getting discouraged happens to all of us and then that special moment happens and you realize, I realize, something I said or did made a difference. Part of this sometimes is just showing up like I talked about last week. Living the way Jesus taught, sharing his love. I got an email from someone I talked with a long time ago and learned that because I reached out to them many years ago and shared that love of Jesus and my love for the church they had finally found their way back to church. That is when I know what we do is all worth it.

We have just such an opportunity this coming week. Vacation Bible School starts this week. VBS is a chance to offer that bread, that encounter with Jesus that changes lives. I’m really pleased with the program that we have selected and the message is a good solid one. I also know that for some of the children who come here, this is the only exposure to church that they will have for the entire year except maybe for Christmas and Easter.

One of the great things about the program that Katie selected is that it is totally based on story and experience. At the Biblical Storytellers Festival this week our speaker was an Episcopal priest and a psychologist. She spent one of the lectures talking about stories and our brains. When you give people a list of facts two parts of the brain are activated. When you tell a story 6 major parts of the brain and a total of 12 parts of the

brain are involved. That is why we remember stories and stories have such great power. Through the stories and the activities we will share Jesus, the bread of heaven, the bread that satisfies with the children who attend. In the song "I love to tell the story" that is sung at the closing worship of the festival each is year is a line that says, "it satisfies my longing as nothing else can do. "

We need to offer the real bread, the true bread that is Jesus. This is more about how we are present to them than it may be about specific curriculum. Our job is to welcome these children and their parents into our parish family. More than anything else to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Bread that as was said last week in the feeding of the 5000 satisfies, fills us and most importantly transforms us. That should be what we as a parish are all about. Reaching out to people, extending an invitation and helping them develop a relationship with Jesus that transforms them. That's what the Jesus movement is all about and we are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement.