

August 12, 2018

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

The last few Sundays, we've been hearing in the gospel readings Jesus referring to himself as the bread of life. We hear that again today as Jesus is trying to explain to the people that the bread that they received in the feeding of the 5,000 and even the bread that they received as their ancestors traveled through the Sinai desert was simply a bread given by God for sustenance during that time and for this life.

But that now God is doing something new this proclamation of the kingdom of God. People are asked to begin to recognize that life is more than the time that they have in creation. That the sustenance that is now being given to the people is a bread that feeds the soul. That feeds the spirit. That ensures life in God's kingdom. Which is here and now but also forever.

And this is a concept that is obviously very difficult for the people to understand. They know the stories of their ancestors. They know the story of the manna. They know the story that participated in the multiplication of the loaves and the fish. They understand the deep meaning of bread especially in the wilderness. And how that is life but they're having trouble with Jesus as he says, "I am this new bread. A bread that came from God. A bread that understands and knows God more deeply than you could ever know. But that you are invited to participate in.

And this bread feeds that part of you that the bread that you usually have can't touch. It's that bread that nourishes the soul. That keeps it alive because it is truly a gift from God. And it is God. And he is that one.

And it's very difficult for them to understand. Certainly from our perspective and on this side of the resurrection, we can see and understand certainly more clearly than they. And so, they have difficulties with that. We know who your father is. Your father is Joseph, a carpenter, how can you say you are this bread of life? The bread that comes from heaven. And Jesus tries to make them understand. Tries to explain. But it is only later that they can truly understand and accept that he is the sustenance that the soul needs for eternal life. It is his being that creates this thing called the kingdom of God. And it is only through him and his invitation that others will hear about, know about, become a part of that kingdom of God.

Now if we skip forward a little bit, we have after the resurrection the beginning of the church. We have the disciples who walked with Jesus and they stayed, in the short term at least, in and around Israel. After Pentecost, they're preaching the good news. They are encouraging people to accept the invitation to be a part of God kingdom here and now. So that they can be a part of God's kingdom forever. They are being fed with the Eucharist. The body and blood of Christ. And they are trying to understand what this means for the living of their life here and now. They have some sense now of the foreverness of God's kingdom.

But how are our lives changed here and now. Paul who was not one of the twelve, but traveled with Jesus, became an apostle after the resurrection. He was introduced to the risen Lord having not met Jesus during his lifetime. Is the one who had been given the task to preach

the gospel, the good news to the people away from Israel. Who may or may not have an idea or understanding of the God that the Jews have worshipped and to invite them to become a part of what this God is doing in the world now. But also, to be a part of eternal life. And as we know from the other readings from Paul's letters, the Epistles to his churches, they struggled with how do we live that out. Yes, we accept the good news. Yes, we accept that God loves us. Yes, we accept that Jesus was so much more than a man. And that in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we have been given this invitation to eternal life. But what do we do now? How do we live that out in our lives here and now when so many don't believe? When so many have no understanding of this kingdom of God.

You have to understand that it wasn't long after the establishment of these churches that they were being persecuted. They were being persecuted by the Jews, who felt like these Christians were misguided. That they were drawing people away from true faith in Yahweh. And on the other side, you have the other Pagan religions who see this as a threat as people are being drawn away. And so, persecution of the church was going on. And so, Paul writes to these folks to give them an understanding about how they are to live their lives and not to give in to the persecutions and to stay strong.

And this is how you live so that people can see, and know, and understand that this kingdom of God that you have been called to. This invitation that you have accepted means living a life of grace, of goodness, of kindness. To care for those that society may not care about. To look beyond the surface of the people that are being invited. And to treat them as brothers and sisters.

In the reading from his letter to the Ephesians today, I find it very powerful. As he tries to explain to the people how they should live their

lives. Because it was contrary to what was going on around them. Putting away all falsehood, let us speak the truth to our neighbors. Tell people what your life is about. About being centered in this person called Jesus. Who you know and believe to be the son of God. Speak it in truth for we are members one of another. He understands that in the persecutions there are times of being angry. When we are persecuted, when we are maligned, when people say things that are untrue about us, we get angry. And Paul recognizes this.

He doesn't say don't ever get angry. He says, "Be angry. This is not fair. It's not right. But don't let the anger lead you to sin." Don't give in to the anger and trade anger for anger. Or persecution for persecution. He calls upon the members of the church. To be angry but do not sin. Get beyond it. Give it up to God. Let God lead you to a different outcome.

What I really like, "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up as there is need. So that your words may give grace to those who hear." Grace is something that we talk a lot about in the church. And we like to talk about God's grace to us. Grace, that undeserved and unexpected blessing from God. That's the definition of grace. And we want that for ourselves. We know if we are being honest with ourselves that we don't deserve what God did for us. We don't deserve a Savior. We don't deserve the blessings that we have been given in our lives. And yet they have been given. And when we recognize that we are grateful.

Paul now calls upon the members of the church to speak to others with grace. To let them have an unexpected, an undeserved blessing. That is what they are being called to give in place of the persecution. They received persecution. They speak truth and they speak grace. So that others might come to know and understand. So that they might have a difference in their lives. And to live their lives differently.

Especially when I read that sentence, I thought how much we need that in our world today. How much we need that in our society. Because too much we hear not words of honesty, but dishonesty. Too many times we hear insults. Too many times we hear labels that are insulting to others. That you're not one of us and therefore, you're not good. People are being insulted. People are being bullied. And especially as we begin this new school year, I am very aware that our children, too many children, are being bullied. And I know that sometime during the course of this year we will hear new stories of children who are bullied to the extent that they go into despair about their lives and about the meaning of their lives and the worth of their lives. To the point that they commit suicide.

That's one of the things Teen Talk that I announced before the service is available, so kids can help cope with that. But more importantly, it is for us to share with our children that they have worth. That they are loved. That they are loved by God to the point that he came into the world and gave his life for them. So, they have the opportunity to live life joyfully. To live life that is loved.

And we need to help teach our children the same thing that Paul was trying to teach this young church. That even though there are times when people will speak dishonestly about you and it will make you angry; don't return anger with anger. Or dishonesty with dishonesty. Be tenderhearted. That's not a bad thing and it's not a bad word. Care enough about yourself and about the other to speak words of grace and kindness. To walk away from the bullying. To come to the aid of those who are being bullied.

For we are here to lift one another up. Christians are here to invite others to be a part of a life of grace. And a life of hope. And a life of joy. We need to share that especially with our children as they go into an

environment that reflects too much of the things that we are seeing in the leadership of our nation. The church is important for the individual. We like to hear that we have been given life and hope for ourselves. But it's more important to know and understand that we are part of a community that we as Paul says are to be imitators of God. To extend grace to those around us. To build up those around us. To celebrate the joy that is in the world. To be grateful for the grace that has come into our lives and to extend grace into others. That's what it is to be the church according to Paul. That's what it is to be a follower of Christ. And that is what each of us is called to be and to do.

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