

August 26, 2018

## Prayer

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

## Sermon

For the last few weeks in the gospels, we've heard Jesus speaking of himself as the bread of life. And in the reading today, he again talks to the people in the synagogue of Capernaum about being this living bread and about how he needs to be consumed in order for them to be part of what he is accomplishing in the world.

He makes a fairly clear division between the flesh and the spirit. The spirit is life he says. The flesh is useless. The flesh is only this body that you carry around that could lead you to so many things that are not good. Not intended in creation. The desires of the flesh too often lead us to hurt one another. To deprive one another of the resources that are abundant in the world.

And yet when we take those resources and equate them with power and authority ... when we equate those resources with who we are and what we are about then we lose sight of the fact that it is truly the spirit that is life. That is important. Because it is by the spirit with which we were created that we are in relationship to God and in relationship to one another. The flesh is only surface. The body is only those things that reflect the feelings and are too easily led astray.

And as Jesus is talking to the people about this. As he's trying to explain to them that it is himself that will feed the spirit. It is himself that will lead them to that place where God has desired for humanity to be from the very beginning. They see how difficult it is because they are so firmly ensconced in what it is to be body, what it is to be flesh, what it

is to be successful. What it is to have power and authority by the flesh. And so, the saying is difficult. How can we follow this? How can we be what you are calling us to be? How are we to live in to be the spirit in which we were created. When the body so often calls us away from that.

And Jesus knows that many of the ones who have been following ... many of the ones who are listening are making a decision. A decision that is ultimately for the flesh. Is for the body. We have to take care of ourselves. We have to be successful. We have to do what we can do for myself and my family. And the more that I can gather around me the more successful I seem to be. And yet they do not know and understand that in that striving for the resources of the world they are going further and further apart from God.

And we are told that at this point many of his followers ... you know sometimes we think that Jesus only traveled with the twelve, but we are told in several places in the gospels that there was quite a large group. A support group if you will. Who wanted to hear and know and understand all that it was that he was doing? So that there were women and men other than the twelve disciples who were following along. Who would travel with them as they could.

And now they were beginning to turn away. Now they were beginning to question who he was. What he was really about. And so, they turned away to go home. And then we have Jesus turn to the twelve. And he asked them do you also want to leave? And we only hear one response. And Peter often speaks for all the disciples in the gospels. But in my heart and my mind I wonder how many of them questioned. Is it time to turn back? Is it time to go back home? To be with our families. To go back to the fishing that we did before. To go back to being a tax collector. To go back to the life that they knew before.

Because that was what they knew. That was what they felt they understood. To work, to provide for self, and not to worry about being connected with God and with all of the people. But Peter and his brashness says, "To whom can we go?" You have the words of life. Now remember that Jesus has just equated life with spirit not the flesh. You have the words of life. You're leading us to where we should have been. Where all humanity should have been.

You are now making it possible. We have come to know and to believe that you are the Holy One of God. They're taking that next step. Where Jesus is not seen simply as a rabbi, a teacher of the law in a different way but the bringer of the kingdom of God. And the only one who can bring that is one who has come from God.

And he is seen and known as the Holy One of Israel. The Holy One of God. The One who will make possible what God intended in creation for those who believe. For those who follow. For those who will give over the desires of the flesh to focus on spirit. Who I am created to be. So that I could be fed by spirit. So that I could come together with others and be fed by the flesh and blood of Jesus. The very presence of the one who brings and makes possible the kingdom of God here and now.

That's his message. It truly has been Jesus' message from the beginning. He has tried to draw the people so that they could begin to understand that how they live their lives. Focused only the flesh, focused only on the now. Focused only on what makes me happy. Focused only on what I want for myself or what I think I need for myself.

And to begin to turn that. To see that they are being called to be a part of something greater. Part of one another. Part of all of creation. And we hear that in the early church. We hear Paul talk about that. About

not giving in to the desires of the flesh but allowing the spirit to lead us to do things that we would not normally do. To forgive others. To acknowledge our own wrongs. To be strong enough to ask forgiveness from others as we have hurt them, intentionally or unintentionally.

That was the voice of the early church, that all are welcome. That all should come. That all should see, and experience live of the spirit as opposed to simply dwelling on what makes the flesh happy. What provides for the flesh. Focus on that relationship with God that gives life to the spirit. That helps us to see the world in a different way. That helps us to see one another in a different way.

And even though there were different voices in the early church. The strongest, the loudest was that one that called for unity. That one that called for us to be in relationship with God and with one another foremost and first. And in many ways, we have lost that voice.

When Peter says, "To whom shall we go?" You have the words of life. And the truth of that statement then is more powerful than it is now. Because when we hear that today we have to acknowledge that the church doesn't speak with one voice anymore. That too much the church has turned to the flesh rather than spirit. That we focus too much on what divides us. What we don't agree on, rather than what we do agree on.

We have the church tearing itself apart. Because one section says no, no we must focus on the law. We must focus only on what we have been told in the first century or earlier about what to do. About what is right. About what is wrong. About what is good. About who we should gather in and who we should cast out. Too much we divide ourselves about who is acceptable to stand and to preach the word of God. Can it be male and female? Can it be heterosexual or homosexual?

So much we look the flesh. And don't give ourselves as the church the opportunity as the church to look at the spirit. The spirit that God has created. The spirit that God intended us to have and to be. The spirit that unites with God no matter what the flesh is like. That spirit is the image of God created by God. Encouraged by God to be in relationship with God and with the other spirits that surround us.

Now the question is do you also want to leave, to go home? And too often the answer is yes. People turn away from the church, why? Because too often we do not fulfill the role that we are called to. To love. To care. To fight for justice for all people. To show mercy to all. To acknowledge that we are all in need of forgiveness because we are all sinners. Because we try to pick and choose what sins are more important to focus on than others. And somehow it always seems that my sins are more forgivable than others.

And so, people turn away. What voice should they listen to? The voice of the Catholic church. The voice of the southern Baptist. The voice of the Anglicans, which can't even speak with one voice anymore. It is for us to speak with a voice of kindness. It is for us to speak with a voice of being fed by the spirit of God. It is for us to speak that even though the flesh divides us and there are differences. That the spirit can still connect with God and with one another.

That must be the voice of the church. It has to be the voice that we carry out into the world as we relate not only to those who come on Sunday but to those that we interact with throughout the week. To remind them that they are a spirit. And that God will feed that spirit and God does feed the spirit. It comes in the words of Jesus Christ. It comes in the sacramental act of gathering together and sharing the body and blood. And it is that call that we must present to the world. It's that call to come. To be a part. To know that you are loved and

cared for. Where the differences can be overlooked, and the spirit can be fed. The life of the spirit can be felt.

Jesus asked the disciples, “Do you also want to go? Is it time to call this to an end?” Perhaps it is time for us as the church to say do you want to come. Do you want to be a part? Do you want to be accepted for who you are because you are who God created you to be? Come and be a part. Know life. Know spirit and know that you are loved.

Gregory Hein – Rector

Renee’ Evans – Transcriptionist