

Bread of life

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Holy One. Amen.

This is a challenging text. In many ways, it challenges us to reflect upon our own motivations and pathways for following Jesus.

Sometimes we too can get caught up looking for the miracles and mystery and miss Christ in our neighbor.

Are we looking for the bread, or are we truly looking for Jesus? What might it mean for us to know Jesus as the Bread of Life in our modern context?

I remember one Sunday at my Field Ed Parish right after everything opened back up after COVID. Everyone was excited to be back in person, yet appropriately cautious. It was a multigenerational Sunday, so we had a special Eucharist that was kid-friendly. The adults loved it, too. Only one of our families had returned to coming in person. But didn't come every Sunday. A decision had to be made at the staff meeting if we were going to change the service to the traditional service or keep it as the multigenerational service for the month, knowing it might only be for two children. There was a discussion about the extra setup and work involved, and ultimately, the decision was made that even if no families show up, we would have fun with it, and it would be worth it. It was a good teaching Eucharist, and the Adults could always use a little refresher occasionally.

Sunday came, and one of our families returned, so there were two children there that day. The time came for the kids to help with the Eucharistic prayer, and they just beamed excitedly to have the table all to themselves. To hold up the bread and wine, which they normally don't get to do when the older kids are there, and then have their choice of noise makers. It was such a joyful moment. One that felt equally matched by the adults singing along with them.

In our text, we encounter the beginning of Jesus' Bread of Life discourse in John. This text builds on last week's feeding miracle as we find a very determined crowd, which Jesus has just fed, now looking for Jesus in Capernaum. As the crowd finds Jesus, he questions their motives a bit. I find this an important point of reflection within the text. Here Jesus is pointing out to those present that they need to dig a little deeper for their motivations.

Jesus is asking them to think differently about why they have made the journey to find him. More accurately, Jesus is asking them to be different. Their thinking seems to be the issue here when they should be believing.

If they keep searching for only that which fills their physical bodies and not which fills their spirit they will continue to miss the point. They are not living in the faith Jesus is trying to share with them. They just aren't quite getting it. They are confused by Jesus' message.

Thus far, Jesus had fed them and healed some of them, and for many, they are getting wrapped up in the wonder of those miracles and asking to call him their King.

They continue to ask what other signs he will share with them so that they might believe as if what he has done thus far has not been enough or is the way of believing, again showing that they aren't quite getting it.

Jesus tries to call their attention to the idea that his purpose is beyond their imagination. As Jesus works to re-center the crowd on God and God's work among them through him, he tries to re-center their focus on the One who sent him. The sender of the bread.

While Jesus has little luck in re-focusing the crowd, as exemplified in their asking for this bread, He knows they are not yet ready, so he responds with, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

This response will be repeated throughout the next few verses of John and is the foundation of our Eucharistic theology.

Now, I shouldn't get too far ahead of myself. First, we must sit with this difficult text. What do we do with a text where everyone is confused? When no one really understands what faith is just yet. Where Jesus knows those gathered aren't ready to hear the fullness of his message. When the only way forward is through the next section of text? Just like our own lives sometimes the only way forward is through our tough or confusing moments. Even when we aren't quite sure what faith looks like.

Sometimes it's ok to sit with our questions until the spirit moves through us. Or the answer comes to us through experiences and not in the next sermon but through our encounter with someone at the grocery store. Knowing we are not alone on our journey.

Sometimes we must have faith and go with where the spirit is leading us. My Field Ed parish had no idea if kids would show up yet went ahead with the multigenerational service and Everyone was really into it. Had the decision not been made to do the multigenerational service

in faith with kids or not that moment wouldn't have happened. While this is a simple example, it can be expanded and extended. There was definitely a sense of bewilderment and interest in chasing a sense of what life was like before in our discussions at my Field Ed site, yet discernment and sitting in discomfort allowed the space for folks to say, let's go for it; if it fails, it's ok we move forward in faith.

Our work as followers of Jesus is to remember the feeling of being loved and held by God, even in our befuddlement and doubt. To share that feeling of love with others as we leave here. To be examples of the gathering at our table. Of God's invitation to all to gather and be a part of the kingdom and remember, as we say in our Eucharistic prayer, "You have filled us and all creation with your blessing and fed us with your constant love; you have redeemed us in Jesus Christ and knit us into one body. Through your Spirit, you replenish us and call us to the fullness of life."

My hope for us this week is that we all take time to think about what the Eucharist means to us in our lives and how we can carry that deeper meaning with us.

And I pray we may reflect on how Jesus calls us to share God's unconditional love with others through our own lives, feeling God's deep abiding in every interaction we have this week.

Amen