

Sermon for August 9, 2015

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They were saying, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know! How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 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.’” The Gospel of the Lord.

There’s a saying, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” We have here another example of that in Jesus’ life. The crowds have been following Jesus; listening to him preach and teach—and have been miraculously fed by Jesus. Jesus has told them that they follow him not because of the signs he has done, but because he filled their bellies with bread. Jesus has told them that they are hungry for more than just bread and that he can give them the bread of life; that whoever eats of this bread will never hunger again. Of course the crowd wants this bread and they plead with Jesus to give it to them.

Up to this point things are going well, but Jesus goes on to say, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” And that’s when the trouble starts. You see the crowds think that they know Jesus and where he comes from; just like when he tried to preach and teach in his hometown. No way, the crowds are saying. He’s Joseph’s son. We watched him grow up and learn to be a carpenter. His

mother Mary and his brothers and sisters still live with us. Who does he think he is saying that he's come down from heaven?

The crowds also know their history and the law and therefore they think that they know God. The events of the Passover have been learned and recited each year since God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. They knew that the bread from heaven was the manna given to their ancestors as they wandered in the wilderness with Moses, not this Jesus fellow. They also knew the central confession of the Jewish faith, "Hear O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one." There is no way that this Jesus is God! They knew it all. Or maybe they knew too much. Or maybe they didn't know enough.

There's also another saying that a little bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing. When we don't have enough information about something it can lead us to make a wrong conclusion. The crowds thought that they knew who Jesus was and they came to the wrong conclusion about him. They thought that they knew how God worked in this world and they missed the new thing that God was doing in Jesus Christ. We aren't any different than those crowds. We see someone act in a certain way and we assume things that we don't know to be facts. When do those assumptions keep us from seeing God working out something new here and now?

Jesus told the crowd that, "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." The crowds knew some things, but their knowing was limited. They let it close their ears from listening; their minds from learning; their hearts from trusting and their eyes from seeing a new vision. They knew who

Jesus was and they knew what God wanted from them. They had made up their minds and nothing Jesus said was going to change that.

We are more like those crowds than we care to admit. There are times when we let our knowledge of Jesus—whether it be too little or too much—keep us from seeing the new way that the living God is speaking to us now. When have we closed our eyes to seeing the work that God is doing now? Are we keeping our hearts open to hear the Spirit calling us to the Bread of life rather than trusting in what we know?

And that's where we get into trouble; when we use knowledge for more than what it's intended. Knowledge is great for teaching, helping and guiding us, but it won't give us absolute answers or a foolproof plan to make things right. In fact, if you want to make God laugh; make a plan! But God does work through our knowledge to direct us towards Jesus and to trust and follow him. And that's risky because when we set out on that journey, even when we think we have a map or a plan, we don't really know where we are going or where we will end up. There's a phrase I heard throughout my years in seminary, "Trust the process," especially when we were going to be placed for our internships. Sometimes it was easier to follow that phrase than others, but I was never alone in that process. When I would open my heart and my mind to the presence of the Holy Spirit; I knew I wasn't doing this all by myself.

The good news is that rather than relying on our own knowledge and understanding; Jesus is the source of our calling and our strength. So why is that good news? Because in those moments when we've had too much of this world

and it makes it hard to trust in Jesus; Jesus hasn't had enough of us. Time after time he comes to us through the Word spoken, through his body and blood shed for us, through the promises of our baptisms and through the prayers and hands of those who worship with us. We don't journey through this life alone. Christ goes with us and leads us along the way.