

“Bread of Life” (John 6) **Sermon on Sunday, August 8, 2021**

Dear church,

Big proclamations and statements. Often they are made with great fanfare, only to dissolve into hot air. As the cliché goes, politicians always make big promises that they either won't keep or can't keep. Sometimes unfulfilled promises have even bigger consequences. For example, when children are raised by a parent who routinely makes big promises that aren't kept, it often affects the child's ability to trust throughout the duration of their lives. So, we need to be careful with big promises and statements. Are we able to back them up?

Which brings us to the gospel for this Sunday. Jesus made some gigantic statements - and the gospel of John is full of them. “I am the Resurrection and the life...if you believe in me you will never die...” “I am the light of the world... Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness...” “I am the Bread of Life... If you eat of this bread you will never be hungry again...” Not surprisingly, people were a bit skeptical about those proclamations. They couldn't see eye to eye with Jesus. What they saw was an ordinary man, born into an ordinary family, trained as an ordinary carpenter. You could visit his childhood home. It wasn't all that impressive. You could talk to his family. Nice people. But why should anyone trust this statement and believe that Jesus was, as he said, “THE” Bread of Life? And so, the Christ described by John constantly clashes with people's expectations and constantly stretches the boundaries of language. What is Bread of Life anyway? Jesus talks about spiritual things; they hear religious things. He talks about eternal food; they think about burgers and fries. He is in touch with God; they are in touch only with their beliefs about God. Jesus and the people, they are bound to misunderstand one another; we are bound to misunderstand Jesus, as long as we don't get the spiritual vibes that surrounded him, enabling us to see deeper. It is a matter of perspective and spiritual eye sight.

Of the four gospels, John offers the most mysterious, deepest and boldest version of the life of Christ. In this sixth chapter John unveils to the believers in the late 1st century the spiritual foundation for a practice that has become part of Christian life and worship ever since. It's called Holy Communion or Holy Eucharist. Later this summer we will offer classes and instructions for children to receive their First Holy Communion in our church. A big deal! It's the first sip of the wine of adult faith for those children, even though they usually just get grape juice. I appreciate the mysteriousness of this sacrament - yes, I respect the non-rational nature of it all. It's so much more than what it appears to be: a little tasteless wafer and a little cup of juice or wine. That's not much, right? And yet, if you get the spiritual vibes, it's more than a meal! It is Bread of Life. It is Christ in and among us. It is God feeding us! And that's what all genuine religion aims at: union with God. The bread and the wine, they are mere catalysts to get closer to the mystery behind everything, which we call God.

A skeptical person might ask: "Well, how do you know it's not just hocus-pocus?" The expression "hocus-pocus" comes from the Latin "Hoc Est Corpus," used in the Latin Mass at the time of the Eucharist, meaning: "This is the body..." Yes, how do we know? We don't know in any scientifically assuring way, and never will. If you started an investigation and broke down all the atoms and molecules of wafer and wine, if you investigated every communion kit in the world, if you went to the Vatican and ripped out the monstrance to analyze the host of St. Peter's Cathedral in front of Pope Francis, you would find the exact ingredients with which these little hosts were made, microbes included, and nothing more. Yet, according to our belief, there is more! It's a matter of spiritual eye sight.

Carl Gustav Jung, the famous Swiss pioneer of Psychology grew up in a Reformed pastor's home. His father was a minister. Throughout his career, Jung was much more interested in the role of religion than his Austrian counterpart Freud. Jung even dabbled in paranormal and esoteric experiences. It's not surprising then that, as he was coming of age in his father's church, he expected that receiving communion for the first time would somehow bring an exciting experience of transcendence. In his memories he recalled that it was disappointing to him. He received the bread. He received the wine. And nothing happened. It was not a paranormal experience. It was not a moment of supernatural enlightenment. It was... What was it?

I would say that grounded, mature faith allows us to eat this bread and drink this cup, knowing that the creator and redeemer of all life likes to dwell in us, likes to be in us; and if we exercise the spiritual vibes given to us through the Holy Spirit, we may even feel it as we receive the sacrament. Religion is more than a few mumbled sentences. Faith is more than what you can ever explain intellectually. And Jesus says: "Trust me. I am the Bread of Life and I lead you to a place of abundance and satisfaction. You will never be hungry again." It's a matter of perspective. Below the surface there is always more than what meets the eye. As Christians we believe that about everything in this world, even people. There is always more than what meets the eye. We are invited to look for it, to hunt for it, to receive this world anew with spiritual eyes. Amen.