

“Good Eats—Part Two”

As you may remember last week’s reading was from the Gospel of John and included Jesus declaring, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” And here we have that verse again this week. To paraphrase the eminent theologian Brittany Spears, “Oops, I read it again.” The real theologians who put together the Revised Common lectionary start us off this week with the verse we ended with last week, then they skip a few verses to get us on to another discourse about the bread.

What is not obvious, even if you read it straight through is that the people speaking against Jesus in today’s reading are not the same group of people in last week’s reading; that is the ones who followed Jesus from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other and back again. They are also not part of the five thousand who were fed with just two fish and five loaves of bread.

The clue that this group is different is in two words—“The Jews.” The folks that had been following Jesus from one side of the sea to the other were never called the “the Jews;” although they probably were Jewish. But whenever we hear the phrase “the Jews” in the Gospel of John it is code for those Jews who do not believe in Jesus as Messiah as the Jewish writers of the Gospel do.

A prominent biblical scholar of the mid-twentieth century, Raymond Brown, put forth the theory that in the Gospel of John we are witnessing the results of a synagogue split. That is, there was a synagogue community that had worshipped together for years, but at some point those followers of Jesus were kicked out of the synagogue by those who did not accept Jesus as the Christ. Whenever we read “the Jews” in the Gospel of John, the writer is referring to Jews who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. It is an odd turn of phrase because the writer of the Gospel of John was undoubtedly a Jew, and, of course, Jesus and his disciples were all Jews. But when the synagogue split over Jesus’ messiahship there began to be some name calling. Unfortunately this fed a terrible anti-Semitism that we sadly continue to see today with the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and worship places, as well as abuse and intimidation of Jews throughout the world. Those demonstrating today in Washington target Jews as well as person of color. This sin is one we Christians need to repent and fervently work to rid the world of.

But back to our Gospel lesson. Last week Jesus was speaking to a group of people who were among those following Jesus around shores of the Sea of Galilee, and who were part of the feeding of the five thousand. They were following him hoping to experience other signs of his messiahship. This week he is speaking with a group of disbelieving folks many of whom know his family and watched Jesus grow up in their community.

Last week’s crowd seemed to be too thickheaded or focused on their bellies to understand Jesus’ message. This week’s group is too grounded in their own everyday experience to understand. Either way they do not

comprehend Jesus' metaphor. Additionally, because they know him so well, or so they think, they consider what he is saying as blasphemous.

His message, an extension of last week's message, is that we have hungers, real bodily hungers, but they are never really satisfied. You eat breakfast and later you need lunch and then a snack and then supper. Your belly might be satisfied for a time but it always needs more. The heavenly bread and living water that he has been sent to give is so fulfilling, that we will not need more of it.

Does that mean that we get baptized and have communion once and we are done? Probably not, because our world bombards us with the message that there is not enough that we need more, that we ought to have more and that we deserve more of everything. These messages and our desires distract us from the true fulfillment in God. So we return each week to rediscover and reaffirm our fulfillment in Christ. We come to church to get our heads screwed back on properly after being distracted, like lost sheep, by a bit of grass that takes us off the path and away from the flock.

We come back to hear and remember the word that fills us up and restores us in Christ Jesus. None of us can do it alone and all of us need reminding that we have been filled. We also need reminding that what the world is offering is nothing but glitz, fake fulfillment, and fake news. We need the Good News of Jesus to bring us back to our senses, clear our heads and our hearts, and keep us on the path with God.

If we are wise we read scripture daily and pray daily for the same reason. It keeps us connected to the ever flowing stream that nourishes us. These practices give us the bread of life that keeps us full. When we get away from it we are like cellphones that run down because we are not connected to the source that keeps us full and whole.

As we discussed last week we understand that Jesus fills our needs in a very elemental way. We are opened and enriched and made whole through Jesus. This week we are reminded to overcome our skepticism and literalism when we encounter Jesus as the Bread of Life. His love and teaching are what truly give our eternal spirits the nourishment that they need to find abundant, full, and eternal life in this world and in the world that is to come.

When the powers of this world calls and attempts to woo you, remember the true Bread of Life that is your way, truth and life, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the living bread "that came down from heaven" just for you.