

2021.08.01 Sermon 10th Sunday after Pentecost ©Gyllian Daviest†

Bruno Barnhart wrote these words about the Gospel of John:

“The incarnate Word of God is bread. The Word is already food and drink in the Old Testament, but there the threshold of understanding is lower: the images may be taken as metaphor.

*Here the metaphor, the symbol, has become a physical reality and even a person. It refuses to be spiritualized or allegorized: **I am your food.** I have come to be consumed and assimilated: first into your hearts and minds through listening and faith; then into your very bodies which I will transform into my own.*

*Jesus is the divine light and life made visible, audible, touchable ... and finally ingestible. To “see” him, to listen to his words and believe in him, and thus to **feed upon him**, is to begin to surrender the boundaries of one’s own consciousness and one’s own being.”*

Bruno Barnhart *The Good Wine: Reading John from the Center*

Why do the crowds follow Jesus? Not because they understand who he is. No. They follow him because to them he’s a miracle-worker, a magic show, a fascinating and amazing source of entertainment. And... he just might heal them of whatever is causing them pain. Could be physical pain. Could be emotional pain. Could be mental torture - healing sounds like a good thing, doesn’t it? Plus he feeds them. And maybe, he’ll free them from the Roman oppression. Their new king!

Only, do they see? - following and believing in Jesus comes at a cost. A high cost. It means changing their lives. And that’s pretty terrifying! So do they really want this bread of life? Are they willing to believe in him? Maybe not! But in the meantime it’s oh so fascinating watching what he’s up to. And you know, this bread that gives life to the world... it does sound tempting. It does sound like something a person would want to experience. Maybe. But what are the strings that are attached?

Jesus offers a difficult, counterintuitive, countercultural truth. That’s the faith he’s talking about. Not easy. Not simple. Faith that requires a willingness to surrender. Surrender to the encounter with the way and the truth and the life. Surrender to something that is completely countercultural, completely outside the known boundaries of our lives. Well that’s just plain scary. We’d be foolish to think otherwise. So committing to live in faith also means being willing to take the risk of losing what’s usual, what’s familiar, what’s comforting. It’s huge.

What it means is letting go of believing we have all the answers. Or at least that we know what the answers should look like. We’ll have to let go of being able to say “yes, I understand.” As a modern people we live in a world that promotes the idea that we have an inalienable right to comprehend anything and everything. So for us in

our time - Jesus is quite problematic. Cause he's just not that straightforward! And consider this - what if we only 'get' this truth when it's gifted to us... What if we have to wait until God sees us as being ready to comprehend, even the smallest part, of the way and the truth and the life??? What then? Are we willing to surrender to waiting without knowing? Are we willing to be not in the know? Are we willing to give up our intense desire for control of the world we live in? And how do we go about this?

Right from the outset of this passage we're offered one **metaphor after another**.

Metaphors which could be keys for us to open the doors of understanding. Jesus is

1. **not going to be found in the expected places** but in the least expected places.

And yet we continue to seek him where we want to find him. Still we see how...

2. **the crowd persisted until they found him**. So important for us to remember! No matter what's happening it's crucial we keep seeking for Jesus. Keep knocking on that door. Keep opening our eyes for where he might turn up. And then...

3. the crowd asks "Master, **why did you come here?**" It's a reproach, almost a whine. What are you doing here; you're supposed to be there. We can play with those lines too - where do we expect to find Jesus and thus miss him when he really turns up where we weren't looking? And then...

4. the crowd becomes either obtuse or stubborn. "Give us a sign," they say. Give them a sign? How about healing people? How about raising people from the dead? How about feeding 5,000 people to sufficiency with only five loaves and two fish? All of these things have already happened but were they paying attention? Apparently not. Or maybe they just wanted it to be easier. And they weren't alone in that. Think of the disciples saying things like "these words are difficult." They're probably thinking, 'Why don't you make it easier for us to get this? Easier for us to do what you want?'

Is that us? Are we constantly on the search for the simpler and more straightforward version of the teachings of Jesus? How do we shake off the dust of looking for easy answers and turn ourselves towards following the one who promises life that sustains far beyond the easy pleasures of instant gratification? Which would you choose? Quick gratification of your superficial desires or deep soul sustenance of your inner self's passionate and secret yearnings? And to what will you pay attention?

Maybe it depends on the day? But these times we're living in? I don't think there's much room for procrastinating. A headline caught my eye - How We'll Live in a Post-Water World. What will be our bread then? Or how about a post-pandemic world - what will be our bread then? How will we listen into the words of Jesus, listen into the Word and surrender our boundaries so we may be fully inhabited by Christ? Here we are - let's find out.

Amen.