

## Lectionary 19 Proper 14 B 18.docx

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.  
Amen.

How many times does what we think we know stand in the way of truly knowing or understanding what it is we are seeking? How often does the expectations of our world, our culture, our upbringing, our traditions keep us boxed in unable to live life outside the traditions or boxes we have come to know?

This is in some ways what connects us to the disciples and followers of Jesus, especially in the Gospel of John. The crowd surrounding Jesus is from the area around his hometown. They have been following Jesus and his disciples around the Sea of Galilee as Jesus heals the sick, cures the lame, cleanses the lepers and feeds thousands with just a few loaves of bread. All along the way Jesus is also trying to help them to understand who he was and where he came from so they might better understand what he is saying to them. Jesus is working to help them to believe in him and in doing so they might believe and come to know the one who sent him so they might live a new life in the world for the sake of the whole world.

The last few weeks we have been making our way through the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel. At the start of the chapter Jesus is teaching the crowds all day long, knowing they were hungry he feeds them. Last week, the same crowds come looking for him and Jesus tells them, 'you seek me not because of the signs I am doing so you might believe, instead you are looking for me

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because of the bread I gave you to eat.’ This is where Jesus begins to turn things upside down. Here Jesus starts to break the molds, working to overcome the traditions and expectations as to what they understood about the Messiah, who he was going to be and what he would do for them in the world.

The people as well as the disciples were thinking about bread, the food which they consumed, they were interested in the signs Jesus is doing. They were thinking with the minds and their stomachs. Then Jesus declares ‘I am the bread of life. I have come down from heaven so that whoever believes in me might have life.’

That is when the people get stopped in their tracks, where they get distracted by what they think they know about Jesus and who Jesus really is. They say, ‘Wait, this guy just said he is bread and that he has come from heaven doing the Fathers will.’ They are truly confused. They are confused because when Jesus said he has come down from heaven they only were able to see Jesus the person, the child they have known all their lives. The crowds ask each other “Is this not the same young man we know from town? Is he not Mary and Joseph’s son? Is this not Jesus the same guy I played games with as a child?”

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This is where one could translate verse 43 a little more bluntly, when Jesus said 'do not complain among yourselves.' In some ways Jesus responds to them by shouting, 'shut up and listen. You might say Jesus was encouraging them to quit thinking with the stomachs, because it is not about the bread they were given to eat. To not make decisions with their minds, because their minds were leading them astray. Jesus was saying; 'I am more than I appear to be. Stop and listen and keep watch with your heart for it is your heart that knows the will of my Father.' Stop considering what you think you know, what traditions tells you about who the Messiah would be and consider a new way of living outside, beyond what you have grown accustomed to expecting.

Here on this side of the cross, for us who have grown up learning the stories of Jesus, we often wonder how these people could have been so dumb. How could they have not seen Jesus for who he was. After all they followed him around, they saw the signs and participating in the miracles. While we have a perspective they were not able to achieve, is it really any easier for us?

What do you hear Jesus proclaims, 'I am the bread of life.' or says; 'Very truly I tell you who ever believes will have eternal life?' What do those phrases mean to you? What tradition or box does your mind take you to, that keeps you from understanding what Jesus is saying? For so often when we hear Jesus proclaim that he is the bread of life, our minds go to the sacraments, to

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the meal we will partake in. When Jesus says he is the bread of life we hear him calling us to come and to partake, to come and share in the meal he has prepared, to come and join with the family.

A week ago, I was at our church camp with some of you and still many more have participated in camp over the years. You may remember the term family is how we often refer to ourselves at Camp. It is there away from the busy connected world we take time to learn about Jesus, to hear the stories and to try to understand how we are called to live life differently when we return home.

This year we considered how in our weakness, God strengthens us and sends us out to serve others in the name of Jesus our Savior. How we come home part of the family of God, part of the body of Christ in the world. It is part of our tradition we gather at the last camp fire of the week and share in the meal Christ gives us, here we receive the bread from heaven, the body of Jesus. Many years there is one of our younger campers who participates in the meal for the first time. Here they are welcomed into the body of Christ and like all of us sent home to live a new life, a life different from the expectations of the world.

Jesus as the bread of life is about sustaining us not only in this life but in the life and in the world that is to come. When Jesus said; 'Very truly I tell you who

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ever believes will have eternal life?' Jesus was trying to get them to understand that what they are seeking is right there in front to them. That this new life is not some place in the future, not some mystical last day but here and now.

Our understanding of eternal life sometimes boxes us in, keeping us from hearing or understanding what Christ is telling us. For me belief in Jesus, and in the Father, the one who sent him, by the power of the Spirit gives us life here and now. In that way eternal life is the in breaking of the future into our present reality.

I often hear of people talk about eternal life as a day, a time in the future, that is what happens to us in death or what will happen on the day of the resurrection when Christ comes again. If that is where you are at, then I would suggest you are allowing what you think you know to distract you from the reality around you. For us who are in Christ, for us bound together through the waters of baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit, are called to live in two worlds, to live in the already and the not yet. For we walk with Christ and he with us everyday in this life even as we await his coming again. This is the new life, the eternal life we have been called to live.

Here I think Paul in his letter to the Ephesians makes things a little clearer as we seek to live a new life in Christ. The last couple of verses remind us of what it

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might look like to live as a child of God in the world. *“Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children and live in love, as Christ love us and gave himself up for us.”*

We are to live as imitators of God. In doing so we live as aliens and sojourners in this world, living not as the world expects us to live but to live as ambassadors of Christ showing the love of God to a world in need. When we live in a new way we do not have to worry about how we put away all the bitterness or wrath or anger or any of those other things because we are able to live as forgiven people forgiving others in the name of the one who has forgiven us.

When we live in this way, we frustrate the actions of the world, we break out of the mold and of the traditions of our past to live new lives, to live as a new creation, seeing and hearing and doing the will of God. And the will of God the Father is that all who see and believe in the Son will have eternal life.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

*Pastor Michael*

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John 6:35-51 (NRSV)

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; <sup>38</sup> for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day."

<sup>41</sup> Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> 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'?" <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> 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. <sup>46</sup> Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> 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."