

“Journey to Wisdom”
13th Sunday after Pentecost – Aug. 19, 2018 - John 6:51-58

Our 5 week journey in John, Chapter 6 started simply with the Feeding of the 5,000, where Jesus miraculously fed the multitude by providing bread for everyone, and allowing them to eat. When then moved a level deeper, and talked about manna, the miraculous food that God rained down from heaven to feed the people of Israel in the wilderness. Here, they learned to depend on God for bread, which equals our relationship with God through Jesus. Today, Jesus invites us to *eat my flesh and drink my blood* (and perhaps we’ve gone just a little too deep.)

However, going deeper is truly a Biblical concept. Our Old Testament reading from Proverbs today ends with an invitation from Lady Wisdom herself, a personification of God, which (by the way) is foundational to our modern understanding of the Holy Spirit as feminine. Our passage concludes, *“Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”* The Hebrew word used for insight is חֵכֶם bîynâh, “bee-naw,” or, understanding, knowledge, or wisdom. Suffice it to say, wisdom is highly rated, especially in the book of Proverbs, which is attributed to Solomon, King David’s son, who was crowned at 16. God appeared to the young king in a dream and told him to ask for whatever he wished. Famously, Solomon asked God for wisdom and thus we get the well-known phrase, “The wisdom of Solomon.”

Wisdom is beyond just learning. Wisdom is knowing added to experience. For example, if you have ever tried learning to drive a van with a manual transmission. I heard about the odd dance of both feet on two pedals, going in opposite directions with exactly the right timing. Personally, I had comprehended the concept. However, it only made sense once I actually accomplish the maneuver successfully, without grinding the clutch or stalling out. And then, it takes a while to actually come to wisdom about shifting and clutching and accelerating. You have to learn your stuff, and then engage it. You have to feel it, and then you can live it. Sort of like believing in Jesus. First, we learn and engage. Then we feel it, and live it.

The Gospel of John has been taking us on a journey to wisdom. Now, it’s always worthwhile to examine what we believe about Jesus - personally, as a Christian in community, and as Lutherans. Many of you have heard me speak of our patchwork quilt of faith, because we get little patches for our quilts from pastors, youth directors, grandmas, campus pastors, etc. Sometimes they last a very long time. Sometimes, the patches just wear out and are in desperate need of replacement. That’s why it’s good to check the quilt now and again.

“The more certain you are the less room you make for faith,” says Craig Barnes. *“It ceases to be that which is active and alive but instead becomes solidified and fossilized...”* So it is good that our Rabbi, Jesus, uses words and images that catch our attention:

“Living Bread from heaven... (which we hear fairly easily)

This bread is my flesh.” (which we might be okay with...)

“Eat this flesh and drink the blood...” (Whoa. Yuk. Ew.)

That just makes one shudder, and think of Cannibalism, Zombies, and Pagan worship. And yet, this kind of passage makes us listen, and draws us in to question. We ask: What is Jesus really saying? Is this a *metaphor* (graphic!) Is there a deeper message? If so what? To which we might remember, well, it IS the language of animal sacrifice, familiar from the Temple that Jesus knew from his childhood:

Flesh was to be burned on the altar and offered to God;
Blood was the life force; spilled to atone for sins.

Could “Bread as flesh” be understood as an offering to nourish us? Could Jesus include blood as sacrifice for forgiveness of sins? Herein lies the depth of our relationship – Jesus is doing bread (I AM the Living Bread...) for our nourishment and for our forgiveness.

You might begin to see how the Lord’s Supper became the Eucharist (Greek for “joyful”). For some, the images we might project on Holy Communion Come from Matthew, Mark and Luke - *“on the night he was betrayed.”* But in John, Jesus’ teaching about God’s willingness to sacrifice for us comes in the middle of his ministry; not at the end of his life. He was speaking about Eternal Life, NOT so much the Meal. And if you will recall in John, the Lord’s Supper is more about footwashing than food, the focus on serving the other, rather than feeding yourself. ***Wisdom tells us that Jesus Bread is Living Bread, not Dying Bread.***

Imagine Holy Communion as marking Jesus’ life with us - not just his death for us; so when you are receiving Christ – you’re holding Jesus in your hand. You can **feel** the Living Bread from heaven – dwelling with us, bestowing words of grace and love upon us and nourishing us for our journey into the world. This Table of Grace is our “touch point” – our manna in desert – our bread for this day.

We did a wedding here yesterday, and heard again how “two become one flesh”. The Body of Christ is our flesh as we bring God’s love into the world. Jesus’ love is our Daily Bread to strengthen us; Jesus blood is spilled as sacrifice, to release us from captivity to sin. And this is not a one-time deal, but a gift that goes on and on and on...

Today is Rally Day, when we focus on each of our journey to wisdom - from our littlest children to elders in the community. And we give thanks that Jesus, Emmanuel – is always *God with us* – as we learn and live and grow – in wisdom. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Pastor Susan Langhauser
Advent Lutheran Church
Olathe, KS

Resources: Maxwell Grant/Day1; Karoline Lewis/Working Preacher