

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 19, 2018
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

Love is All You Need

In the reading from Kings this morning, the author seems to be taking a page from the tales of the Arabian Nights, the story of *Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp in particular*. The account of Solomon comes as close as possible to God acting as a proverbial genie, by offering to grant Solomon a wish. It says, "*At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' Solomon replies, 'Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'*" Solomon's request for wisdom pleases God, and so God also grants him two other things, honor and riches—wishes granted! Adding a bonus of long life for good behavior.

Without wisdom, a fool and his money are soon parted. I think this means that it is better to invest in things that last. Investing in things that last is where I think the Gospel today begins. Jesus said, "*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.*" The life of the world—that is what is at stake here. All we need to do is understand what Jesus means when he tells us that He is the bread of life.

When we talk about bread it means something particular to us in our lives today. Many of us have memories of grandmothers baking bread, visiting a favorite bakery, learning how to bake ourselves, or even that we have developed an allergy and cannot have traditional breads. Our perspective seems far from that of the people who were hearing these words from the Gospel for the first time. I want to give us a glimpse into what bread meant to those who were with Jesus at the time.

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt, only a couple generations removed from those gathered to hear this message. There was hard work in their lives, they were slaves, but they did have water, food, and shelter. While the Israelites were in the desert, God sent them Manna, a bread-like substance that they collected every morning. It was this *bread from heaven* that kept them from starving as they walked toward the promised land—a land now occupied by Rome.

I am sure these people gathered felt like they could just not get a break. They had been waiting for the Messiah, hoping to be delivered, hoping for a life where there would be enough for them. Perhaps they were hoping there would be more than just enough. Hoping that the Messiah would herald in a time when they could experience excess. Excess not known to their ancestors who collected bread from heaven in the wilderness. I think they may have had some preconceived expectations about the Messiah, and about the bread.

Jesus said, '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.' Those words to this audience had to seem confusing if taken literally. Some even grumbled and asked "*...how this man can give us his flesh to eat.*" It reminded me of Nicodemus asking how he was to crawl back into his mother's womb so he could be born again.

To clear that up, Jesus then adds, "*Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.*" Much better, don't you think? Surely that cleared up their confusion—not!

I have to say, that as a child enrolled in a Catholic school, we sang Christian songs about every day. Are any of you familiar with the song, Sons of God? I was truly disturbed by that song as a child of six or

seven. Still, I sang along with my classmates; *Sons of God, hear His holy word. Gather 'round the table of the Lord. Eat his body, drink His blood and we'll sing our song of love, Allelu, Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia!* What were they thinking? Cannibalism? Drink His blood? At age six I did not even want to suck the blood off my finger if I cut it. What did this mean?

What were they thinking? What are we thinking? The Gospel continues—I hope this gets clearer soon. *“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”* Do you get it now?

This can be a difficult, complicated, and confusing Gospel. There are four Sundays in this series that speak of Jesus as being the bread of life, so I think it is pretty important that we take a look at what this might really mean.

Perhaps if we employ some scientific principles it will help us sort out the meaning of the Gospel. Have any of you heard of Ockham's Razor? I took a lot of philosophy classes in college. In as much as I want to stand here and tell you that I was a voracious reader and was totally into the philosophy behind scientific theory, the truth is, I learned more about Ockham's razor from watching Star Trek. I kid you not, in at least three episodes, when the crew was faced with some seemingly unsolvable problem—just when all seemed lost—someone would say, “Of course, Ockham's razor!” Immediately, the solution to the problem would present itself.

Ockham's razor is a problem-solving principle that holds that the simplest solution tends to be the right one. *“When presented with competing hypotheses to solve a problem, one should select the solution with the fewest assumptions.”* Ockham's razor is attributed to William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347), who was an English Franciscan friar, scholastic philosopher, and theologian.

In science, Ockham's razor is a method of reasoning used in the development of theoretical models. Ockham's razor is not considered an irrefutable principle of logic, it is the preference for simplicity in the scientific method. For each accepted explanation of a phenomenon, there may be a ginormous number of possible explanations. Simple theories are preferred over complex ones because they are more testable, and less fallible. Still we are trying to understand a concept given to us by Jesus concerning how we are connected to God and each other using reason, knowledge, and scientific processes.

Are you still with me—we're trying to sort out what Jesus means when He tells us to eat his body and drink His blood? Actually, there is one word in the Gospel that clears up all of the confusion for me—abide! Abide is a verb. Jesus is saying, stay with me, continue to share my message of love, continue holding onto my teachings, and stay in close relationship to me. Stay connected to me and live into my message by following my command to love God, and love your neighbors.

Let's test our simple theory: God is love. Jesus is God. If we consume love and let love consume us, we will abide in Jesus, and Jesus will abide in us. I think I am good with that! Remember that abide is a verb, it is an action word, so when love abides in you—share your love with each other, share it, and grow it by giving it away! Abide in Jesus and love will abide in you! Your body is the temple where love lives—use it to do good works in the world, be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Love, is the foundation of The Jesus Movement Bp. Curry speaks about. *Love is all you need, Love is the opening Door. All you need is love. Love is what we came here for.* Abide in Jesus, for He is the living bread.

It is just that simple. Ockham's razor, the notion that the simplest solution tends to be the right one, seems to work with this Gospel. God is love, Jesus is God, love God and love your neighbors. If you do that, you will abide in Jesus, and Jesus will abide in you—and as God is eternal, so shall you be. It is just that simple. Amen

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1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Psalms 111

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam%27s_razor

<https://www.workingpreacher.org>

Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon of Human Achievement, by Walter Brueggemann. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005.

Star Trek Voyager episodes and others