

Sunday, August 25 – Morning Message

Will you pray with me? “It’s me, it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer...it’s us, it’s us, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer...” As we seek “Bread for the Journey,” feed us with your holy Word, O God, either through me or in spite of me, I pray in Jesus’s name. Amen.

Morning

The Gospel-writer John’s bread of life discussion gives us a view of John’s vision of discipleship. It suggests the radically all-consuming nature of discipleship: to be transformed into the image of Christ himself – to be Christ in this world. It suggests that the task of discipleship means giving Jesus our souls, allowing Christ to enter our minds and hearts, and transform them. As United Methodists, our Wesleyan tradition upholds the belief that our church attendance, our good works, our participation in Holy Communion are not an end in themselves, but rather means to an end. They are the means of grace that serve to unite us with Christ. The bread of life conversation implies that disciples are to be Christ for the world, to be concerned for the welfare of the world and all the people, all the creatures in it. This suggests that discipleship is an ongoing process, through which we transform ourselves into the likeness of Christ, guided and strengthened as we are by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

John 6 has guided us through our series on “Bread for the Journey” that concludes today. This conversation began two weeks ago for us, and our conversation has been about the bread of life, the bread of heaven – explaining it, defining it, identifying it. But it really has not been about bread at all. It’s been about Jesus and all of who he is. In the passage we just heard from John 6, Jesus’ disciples plead with him, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” In our own ways, we plead with Jesus, “This is too hard! I can’t do this!” Hmmm. Sounds like me at exercise class, on a fairly regular basis! But this is how Jesus reveals his point in John 6. He wants people – then and now – to “abide” in him. He wants people to live in him and to do so continuously – to do so at all times. He draws people to himself and invites their dependence on him, in all things, in him alone. The more we realize that faith in him calls us to take in the very essence of him, to embrace his death and resurrection, and to emulate his way of living and dying for others, the more difficult the journey of faith becomes. This revelation is not intended to discourage us from witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all we meet, but it will help us remember that our calling is a strange and difficult one! It is to be more than skin deep, reaching into every fiber of our being – our lives, our workplaces, our bank accounts, our family relationships, our daily

schedules, and all the other ways we choose to live as Christ, for Christ and for our neighbors in all places.

As John Wesley affirms, Jesus offers a holistic salvation. Let us be reminded that one of the biggest mistakes we could make in the church is to believe the only bread God commands us to share with people is the spiritual bread from heaven, thinking that it is somehow separate from their physical needs. But God cares for our physical needs, and so God has given us enough material resources for all of God's creation. The challenge is to administer and distribute them wisely, according to God's will. For some in need, the bread they receive, from us, to meet their very physical needs, is the first, the only way they may ever come to know Jesus. Mahatma Gandhi said it this way: "There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread." The church's mission is always to share with people the bread from heaven, the bread that gives eternal life, yes, while at the same time responding to their physical needs. Doing this should never be a burden for us. When we eat the bread from heaven, the bread of eternal life, when we abide in Jesus and he abides in us, we are naturally moved to show love for our neighbors in all situations, in all places. As we receive "Bread for the Journey," we are moved to share "Bread for the Journey."

We have been blessed by the sharing of two personal testimonies affirming where and how the found "Bread for the Journey," and today, we welcome a third... [Colleen Crabiel]

As Jesus promises to be our bread of eternal life, dare we "abide" in him with all of our lives, for all of our lives? Dare we live in dependence on him? In the moment that we choose Jesus as our "Bread for the Journey" – when we choose to truly abide in him and accept him abiding in us – we choose life. We give up the notion that we are in control. Worry and fear truly no longer have the upper hand. We understand that we are no better or worse than any other child of God because of anything about us. We trust that we are loved by God. When we can accept the love of God that is pure grace, love flows from us, we love others, and love grows in the world.

At the end of the day, life – real life, abundant life, eternal life – is hard to fathom, hard to accept, hard to imagine that it could be ours. It turned out to be too hard for Judas to accept, and each of us have known people, sadly, for whom it was too hard to accept. This is truth. Each of us makes our own way to the acceptance of real life, abundant life, eternal life in Christ in our own ways,

along our own paths. Here's my own brief testimony to the bread of eternity. Since our dad died in March of 2017, I have encountered a few twists and turns in my path to perceive the full meaning of eternal life. There is no doubt in my mind, I have discovered, that my dad has received the promise of eternal life, and so I feel that he is very much a part of that great cloud of witnesses that surround us and serve to guide us. That's the fancy way to say it. The plain way to say it is that I feel that he's watching me – he's aware of what I choose to say and do, what I choose to refrain from saying and doing. And as I have always wanted to make him proud of me, I do now even more. So if I feel that way about my dad, how much more should I feel that way about my eternal God, and my loving Savior Jesus Christ?

We are at the end of our journey through Jesus' Bread of Life conversation in John 6. And together we've learned that it's about much more than bread. As it turns out, it's about much more life than we can ever imagine – life in the here and now, and life for all eternity.