

Bread that Truly Satisfies
John 6:25-34; 52-59
November 3, 2019

I like to get up in the morning, go downstairs and start the coffee, get my fruit and cereal ready, and open up the Globe on the iPad and read the news. Gail joins me and reads the Spectator. The other morning Gail read to me the selection from Sept 2nd, of Eugene Peterson's devotional, **Living the Message**. It was entitled *A Secular Culture*. Peterson's thoughts for that day twigged my thinking for today's reflection on John 6 that we read.

Peterson talks about the fact that secularism has reduced our culture to *thing and function*. We are people with lots of things coming our way and often these occupy us so completely that we can do so much without bothering about relationships and meaning. But after a while we find ourselves lonely among our things and bored with our freedom. So we try to resolve this with more things and engage in more activity. **So we get more and do more**. And in North America we keep up this pattern and have done for decades. And we are surprised that the result of secularism is that we have produced an epidemic of loneliness and boredom. Peterson ends with a paraphrase of Psalm 73 that goes like this:

*Still, when I tried to figure it out,
all I got was a splitting headache...
Until I entered the sanctuary of God,
Then I saw the whole picture:
The slippery road you've put them on,
with a final crash in a ditch of delusions.*

Jesus certainly lived in a very different time and culture from ours. But he speaks to us today as a fresh voice because, first, he had a profound insight into the human condition, and, second, because the emptiness of the human soul is a universal problem that spans time and culture.

Bread is the subject at the heart of our reading. Jesus had just performed an amazing miracle where he turned a few loaves of bread into a vast feast for thousands. Jesus interprets the motivation of those who sought him out after this miracle as material greed, not spiritual curiosity. They were after more of this miracle bread for their bellies. At the beginning of this conversation Jesus tells them that they ought to be careful not to strive for perishable stuff that doesn't ultimately satisfy. Remember how Jesus puts it as he develops his response? He says to them:

Your ancestors ate the manna bread in the desert and died. But now here is Bread that truly comes down out of heaven. Anyone eating this Bread will not die, ever. (John 6:49ff)

Timely advice for us today, is my guess!

This is a theme replicated in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well where **water** replaces **bread** as the controlling metaphor. She is told, as are these folks in John 6 that the things they desire don't reach down deep enough to satisfy their profound spiritual hunger. So, Jesus tells the woman of Samaria, the water I give *will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.*

In our story today Jesus uses their desire for bread as a metaphor for the human family's deep yearning for spiritual connection to God. Commit to my vision, says Jesus, and you will discover what you've been looking for all along.

Listen again to the U2 lyrics from the Joshua Tree album of 1987:

*I have climbed the highest mountains
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you
Only to be with you
I have run, I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls
Only to be with you
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for*

Does that not describe so many of us in 2019 in Western society? Still operating at the material level, they ask what he will do for them if they throw in their lot with Jesus. After all didn't Moses give their ancestors bread from heaven that satisfied their hunger? What are you going to do for us, they basically ask. Jesus responds that the significance of that Old Testament story is not that Moses gave you bread from heaven, but that right now God is offering you the real bread that promises spiritual life for Israel and for the whole world. In other words, this manna story points beyond itself to the one standing before you. Not stopping to think this through they immediately think that this offer sounds too good to be true. They jump right in and say, *Master, give us this bread now and forever!*

But the crunch came when Jesus set out just how much this would demand of them. Commitment to him and his new community meant living in relationship with God, or if you like, loving God and neighbour. It meant living out the covenant in all of life. Absorbing Christ, symbolized by his language of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, might mean changing our priorities, altering our attitude to the acquisition of things, adopting a loving posture toward my neighbour, putting my work, my play, my bank account, my insecurities, and my ambitions under his Lordship which, by the way, will put all of my life in a different perspective. It isn't as simple as signing up for heaven and getting a ticket stamped for the boat to paradise. It means changing how people live, and the responsibility of becoming heralds of a new way of being and doing.

So contrary to the prevailing pattern in present day society in Western civilization, there is no need for getting more and doing more in order to find bliss. We need desperately rather to breath, take a step back, and find our purpose, meaning and compass for life within our relationship with the divine Spirit. These are the massive implications and demands contained in Jesus' words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. This metaphor speaks to us of becoming one with God in Christ. It speaks of a depth encounter with the holy, of transformation and conversion. He is asking, in short, that we be so at one with him by faith, built by the Spirit into a holy temple of God's grace, so that we become his body, the church, in the world.

Not surprisingly, when many of his followers heard this they found it

offensive and they left. Sounds great, we think, so let's get on this offer and make it ours. But it is not as easy as it sounds! So when many left, Jesus asks his inner circle whether they too will go. Their response is one that I suspect would be echoed by many of us today. Speaking for the group Peter responded:

Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God. (John 6:68)

Let us by faith eat the bread and drink the wine reaffirming once more that we are alive in him.

Amen