

Spiritual Nomads (3)

John 6:35; 41-51

October 18, 2020

One of John's favourite sayings is "I am". Here we open with another one: *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* Obviously, John uses this metaphor to convince us that this Jesus is the Christ, the one promised by all the prophets. It comes in response to the back and forth on the bread from God in the Exodus. Unlike the Manna Jesus is true bread from heaven and gives life to the world. Oh, they say, *we would love this bread!*

You just don't get it, do you? This would be a fitting description of what Jesus is thinking when confronted by these opponents, the Jews. You may remember many times in movies these words are spoken. For example, in the ***Devil Wears Prada***, Stanley Tucci as Nigel says it. You hear this phrase often in movies.

John's Gospel, from the beginning, has been telling us this Jesus came into the world he made and yet people didn't get it. So many times Jesus could have said, "you just don't get it, do you". To Nicodemus, "no I'm not talking about being born again from your mother's womb; I'm talking about spiritual rebirth". To the woman at the well, he could have said, "no, I'm not talking about a drink from this deep well; I'm talking about me taking away all your thirst." To the man at the pool, "no, healing doesn't come from bubbling water stirred up by an angel; it comes from me. And here in chapter six, "no I'm not talking about bread that fills you for a couple of hours and leaves you hungry; I'm talking about eternal life that God sent into the world through me. "You just don't get it, do you".

Perhaps these Jews who oppose him and just don't get it, speak for many of us. These folks know his parents, his brothers and sisters. He is one of their own. And because he is just like them, he can't possibly be special. It makes them angry to hear his claims when he just a man standing in front of them. He goes against their

understanding of God as high and holy and aloof from the ordinariness of life.

We sometimes fall into this same thinking, don't we? But if Jesus is just like them, they think they are doomed. How can he, a man, save them? Trying to fit Jesus into their frame of reference as Jews just didn't compute. I'm pretty sure we follow a similar kind of thinking when life gangs up on us. Can we turn to Jesus as the divine Son of God when we are in deep trouble? He was a great teacher, maybe even a prophet, but God, now that is a bridge too far. This is a common refrain in society today. What John is seeking to impress upon us is our need for a personal faith in Jesus Christ. He is the only one to take us into the final age. Jesus as the food for believers is the deepest meaning of the multiplication miracle.

It's a bold claim, isn't it? Jesus says that those who align their lives with his, who truly believe in him will never be hungry or thirsty. I know that there are lots of products on the market that make outrageous claims. Beer that will quench your thirst more than any other drink, cream that will take away all our wrinkles, cars that will satisfy our deepest longing for speed, luxury, security and status. The list is endless. What hunger and thirst does Jesus here refer to?

We all know, if we dig down deep enough, that most, if not all, of these Madison Avenue advertising claims are pure spin and can never do for us all they promise. For a while these products feed the hunger and thirst that gnaws away at our insides like angry flies buzzing around discarded garbage. Things can help quieten our spirit, but they never succeed in filling that God hole.

We discover this word, *spirituality*, banded about a lot today. Ask a person on the street what they think it means and you will find very different ideas on the subject. Commonly what we hear is: *I'm spiritual, but not religious*. In short, I am open to the hidden spiritual world, but not to organized religion. But how do we answer life's big questions: why I am here; what is the purpose of life; what happens after I die; is there a god and is there a heaven? Where do we find answers to these fundamental human questions?

Isn't it interesting that the fundamental questions we have about Jesus and God are shared with these people in John's Gospel? These offer the same objections to Jesus as we hear today. Today many are content to view Jesus as a good man, a great teacher of eternal truths, perhaps even a prophet. But to consider him the Son of God, the one who is sent by God into the world to save us, that is too big a step for many. How can he be man and divine? This is a hard notion to grasp, harder still to believe to be true.

Here is what I think Jesus is saying. His audience believe in one God, Yahweh of the Old Testament. Their question, like ours, asks how Jesus can put himself on the same level as the Father. They are asking how he can be the bread from heaven when he is only a man born and raised in Galilee. Jesus responds to this with this argument: God the Father is still in control and is still the source of eternal life. But it is the Father who has sent me and who draws people to me. Those who are true believers in the Father will be drawn to me. Why? Because God and I are one; I alone have seen God. The Message puts it this way: *Anyone who has spent any time at all listening to the Father, really listening and therefore learning, comes to me to be taught personally-to see it with his own eyes, hear it with his own ears, from me, since I have it firsthand from the Father*

I don't know about you, but I have often wondered why people from the same family go off down different roads in life: some the Jesus way, others their own way. Has this got anything to do with this special drawing of the Spirit?

I think of the example of my brothers in Scotland. I never cease to be amazed at how very different our paths have been so far. I am always profoundly grateful for faith being born in me. It certainly wasn't because I had a more religious disposition than them. I came out of the same family. Our life experiences are different but we all began from the same family environment. Why was it that my heart was strangely warmed to the Gospel, to use Wesley's words, and they remain pretty aloof from it? I'm sure many of us here today could speak of similar family differences when it comes to faith. I am convinced by the Gospel that God's desire is that all would come to repentance and faith. I do believe that for all of us there is a moment when God opens a crack in the door of our hearts and we have

choices to make. Some find in Jesus the bread of life and some choose not to eat. Some have simply said no, or at least, they have said, not yet anyway!

Jesus again opens up the invitation: *Whoever believes in me has real life, eternal life. I am the Bread of Life.* This is not merely an offer of heaven. Such a view would seriously circumscribe what Jesus is saying here. This is much more powerful and expansive than merely an avenue to heaven.

First, he is living bread, the very bread of life, because he will offer his life up to God as a sacrifice for our sins. What it means is that the door into God's presence, which up to now was restricted, is now opened up wide to the whole world.

And second, eternal life is never viewed by Jesus or the New Testament writers as some distant far off land after we die. The life he offers us, begins now! This is what it means to be a spiritual nomad. We are people who started a journey with God in faith and who continue that journey sustained by this living relationship. Our nomadic journey will take us down a very different path from the one our non believing neighbours choose to take. It's important for us to keep connected and nourished by Jesus as the bread of life. On this path we experience dangers, toils and snares, as the hymn says. To meet the challenges we face on this journey of faith my spirit needs to drink deep of the water of life, and eat heartily of God's living bread. This is the life of a spiritual nomad.

Amen