

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 23, 2009
I Kings 8:22-43
Psalm 84
Ephesians 6:10-20
John 6:51-58

Gracious God help me to preach in a way that is good news to the poor , the weak, the widows and the orphans and all those who are most vulnerable. Help me to preach in a way that honors and respects those who will suffer and die today for your Gospel . Help me to preach in a way that seeks not my glory but yours. Not the growth of this church, but the spread of your kingdom.

Whenever I meet with parents and godparents to talk about baptism, I begin by asking them to remember at least 10 stories from scripture which involve water. Usually they are able to come up almost ten: the story of creation where God divides the land from the sea, the crossing of the red sea, Moses being rescued from the water, Noah's ark, the Baptism of Jesus, Jesus calming and walking on the sea, Jesus turning water into wine. They remember some of the miracles of healing that take place in water, the sermons Jesus preached from a boat on the water. Indeed, water is present in scripture stories from the beginning of the bible to the end, from Genesis to Revelation.

Almost as prevalent as stories about water, are biblical stories about food, about eating and drinking: (How many stories about food can you think of...can we come up with 10.)

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Abraham and Sara provide food to guests who are messengers of God. The Hebrew people eat the Passover meal. As they flee, they complain about the food they are forced to eat in the wilderness, God provides them with manna, and quail, food from heaven. The Hebrew Scriptures are filled stories of food sacrificed to Yahweh, as well as rules of purity associated with food. In the Gospels, Jesus eats countless meals with the disciples, Pharisees, tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. Jesus appears on the lakeshore after the resurrection and eats breakfast with his friends, he breaks bread at his last supper before his crucifixion and in Emmaus on the evening of the resurrection. Jesus multiplies bread and feeds thousands. Throughout the books of scripture, one of the images of the fullness of God's realm is that of a banquet with an abundance of fine food and choice wine.

Food, sharing meals is central in the history of the Jewish people and in the life and ministry of Jesus. As a faithful Jew, Jesus would have appreciated the deep symbolism of food. We often take the abundance of food for granted. But, in most of the world , throughout most of history one's next meal is seldom taken for granted. For most people throughout history, there is great uncertainty about how long food supplies will last, how long before food will run out. Because of this, in the Scripture, to share food with someone symbolized deep friendship, and intimacy. In the scripture, God and Jesus eats with people to symbolize the deep intimate love that God has for people.

For the past 5 weeks, our Gospel reading has been taken from the 6th Chapter of John. Beginning with an account of the miracle in which Jesus multiplies bread and feeds thousands of people, John's Gospel has offered an ever deepening reflection about Jesus, as the bread of life. I believe this is the only chapter in the Scripture that is read over the course five consecutive Sundays. I would like to suggest that the reason we have been invited to spend so much time with the Chapter of John is central to our faith.. This chapter speaks to the very core about who Jesus is, and who we are as his disciples. In this

chapter Jesus deepens the symbolism of food and intimacy to its most profound and richest level. In this chapter, Jesus proclaims that not only does God prepare the banquet and eat with his people, but God in fact becomes food for that people. God not only shares a meal, God becomes the meal which people devour. This idea was so offensive, so scandalous, that the early Christians were mocked as those who ate their God. Indeed, it is almost offensive even to us today.this bread we eat is the flesh of Jesus, the wine we drink is the blood of Jesus. In this bread and wine, God becomes our food, God becomes part of us. We are nourished on the very body and blood of God.

John's 6th chapter is proclaiming that in eating and drinking, the bread and wine, the flesh and blood of Jesus, Jesus comes to abide in us. And, as Jesus body abides in us, God who abides in Jesus, also abides in us. The Gospel is proclaiming that by eating this bread and wine we are transformed. We become that which we eat and drink. As we eat and drink the flesh and blood of Jesus, we become the flesh and blood of Jesus in our world today. As we eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus, we are transformed. We no longer see only with human eyes, but we begin to see with the eyes of Jesus. we begin to see with the eyes of God. We no longer work with human hands, but with the hands of Jesus. We begin to work the hands of God. We no longer love with human hearts, but with the heart of Jesus. We begin to love with the heart of God..

In the days of Jesus, such talk was offensive. At the beginning of the John's 6th chapter, the huge crowd was ready to make Jesus king. In today's Gospel, the end of that chapter, all but a few have deserted him. The idea of God becoming their food was too much for them to bear.

Is this difficult teaching too much for you? Is the thought of Jesus truly present in this bread and wine too scandalous to you? Are you willing to become the one eat? Are you willing to be the eyes and the hands and the heart of God? Are you willing to let God live and act in your flesh? Today, as our planet is in such danger, are you willing to enflesh God's love for creation? Today when thousands of people lack food and water are you willing to enflesh God's justice in our world? Today, as our nation debates health care reform are you willing to enflesh God's healing presence? To enflesh God's healing presence does not mean that we side with one reform plan or another. What matters is that we side with God. Are we will to side with a God who always makes a divine option for the poor? Are we willing to side not those who benefit from the way things are, but with those whom God sides with--- the poor, the broken, the lame, the sick, and those in need of healing. Are you willing to let God use your flesh to be the voice of those are left out of the debate---the least, the lost, and the lowly.

The words of Jesus are challenging, and offensive. John's 6th chapter ends with Jesus asking his closest friends, is this too much? "do you also wish to go away?" The question is meant for us as well. Do we wish to go away? May we have the courage to respond, with Simon Peter: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words to eternal life.."