

“Jesus in My Tummy”

Proper 15, Year B – John 6:51-58

preached by the Rector at St. Paul’s, Henderson August 19, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

First things, first. Before we go any further, we need to get some vocabulary straight. As Episcopalians, we talk a lot about sacraments, so I thought it’d be a good thing to make sure we all have the proper definition. According to the *Book of Common Prayer*, a sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” An *outward* and *visible sign* of an *inward* and *spiritual grace*. That means that in the sacraments, God gives us some tangible ways, in our earth-bound, physical existence, to see and to understand the gifts that he is giving us in our spiritual, heavenly reality. Now, everybody say it along with me this time: a sacrament is... an *outward* and *visible sign* of an *inward* and *spiritual grace*. Okay, we’ll get back to that in a few minutes.

It seems like Jesus has been talking about himself as the bread of heaven in our Gospel lessons for weeks and weeks. Actually, it’s only been *four* weeks, since Jesus fed a multitude with a few loaves and a couple of fish. The builders of the Lectionary have reinforced this lesson again and again for the last few weeks by overlapping our readings from John’s Gospel so that we hear Jesus tell his listeners – including us – that *he* is the bread from heaven, that he *himself* is the means by which we are all fed and nourished and sustained. It seems the Capernaum crowd needed to hear it over and over again just for it to sink in. And though we may be getting a little weary reading it week after week, maybe we need to hear it over and over again for the same reason.

Some years ago, during what Jenny calls our exile in the flatlands of Nebraska, I was called by a parishioner who lived in one of the little towns down the road from Hastings. She had fallen and broken her leg and actually called me to “apologize” for not being able to get in to the Cathedral for worship. I offered to bring the Sacrament to her, of course, and when the appointed day came, I reserved some of the Sacrament from our mid-week celebration and set off for the booming metropolis of Clay Center. When I arrived I got an unexpected bonus in the form of her four-year-old grandson who had just been dropped off from pre-school. Having been relatively constrained all morning, the young fella’ was in full four-year-old motion overdrive, demonstrating his gymnastic moves, his sprinting speed and his top-of-the-lungs singing voice for the visiting stranger.

After a few minutes of general chit-chat, during which the exuberant youngun’ brought one treasure after another to the living room for my inspection, I offered to begin our celebration, and the boy’s grandmother invited him up into her lap for the liturgy. The little boy listened quietly and carefully as I read a short reading from the Gospel, and during the prayers he pressed his hands together, bowed his tousled head and closed his eyes so tightly it looked like it hurt. When the time arrived for Communion, he held out his two small hands to receive his share of the blessed Body of Christ.

We finished the prayers and my little buddy sat quietly in his grandmother’s lap as we talked, his grandmother stroking his hair, putting it back in a reasonably ordered arrangement. “Isn’t it wonderful,” his grandmother finally asked him, “that you have Jesus in your heart?” The boy’s little head bobbed up and down hard enough to completely undo his grandmother’s gentle ministrations. “Yeah!” he almost shouted, looking up into her face and then into mine, “And Jesus is in my tummy, too!”

I looked from the boy’s beaming face to his grandmother’s as she shrugged as if to say, “Kids say the darndest things.” But, you know, I think maybe the little guy was on to something, because of course... a sacrament is an *outward* and *visible sign* of an *inward* and *spiritual grace*.

You see, it’s not enough to have Jesus seated on his throne up in heaven. Reducing the Christ who lived and died, suffered and bled as one of us to some far off, far removed potentate belies the very particular, very *personal* way in which he involved himself in the human condition, in *our* lives.

Nor is it enough to have Jesus in our *heads*. Reducing the Christ that presided at the creation of everything that is, seen and unseen, to just another historic figure that can be analyzed and dissected, evaluated and quoted, turns faith into mere intellectual assent and robs him of the power to change *anything*. Faith that is nothing more than a formula is no faith at all.

And as much as it might annoy my more evangelical brethren and sistern, it is also not enough to have Jesus in our hearts. Reducing the one who called himself the way, the truth and the life to some sort of warm and fuzzy *feeling* may well acknowledge how deeply he affects us, but it fails to live up to the Eternal Son of God who was and is and will forever be the same. His reality and his power and his love for us are completely independent of our own fickle feelings at any arbitrary moment in our lives.

So, back to our vocabulary lesson one more time. Say it with me again: a sacrament is an *outward* and *visible sign* of an *inward* and *spiritual grace*. Jesus tried and tried and tried to tell those folks following him back and forth across the sea, those folks looking to be fed again, those folks looking for some outward and visible sign that he was really the one they were expecting to lead them back to the Father, Jesus tried to tell those folks that what they *really* needed was inward and spiritual grace. In the end, he had to spell it out as he broke bread with the few that stayed with him the night he was betrayed. “Take this,” he said in the end, “and eat.” “This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.” In the end, his body broken on a hillside for all to see, he gave *himself* for us, an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace that is yours and mine for life eternal.

We need very much to have Jesus not only in heaven, not only in our heads, not only in our hearts. Like my young friend, we *also* need to have Jesus deep in the pit of our tummies, deep within ourselves, deep in and through *every single* part of us. And you know what? That is the precisely the point of our vocabulary lesson today. That is precisely the point Jesus has been making over and over for weeks and weeks now. That is precisely the point of sacramental living – that Christ feeds us and Christ *fills* us with his own blessed presence over and over again.

Sometimes, if you’re watching for it, you get the greatest gifts from children. But maybe you remember that from weeks and weeks ago, when Jesus fed everyone who was hungry from one little boy’s lunch.