

## The Main Course

### Proper 15, Year B – John 6:51-58, Ephesians 5:15

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, August 16, 2015*

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.

“Be careful,” Paul says, “how you live.” It seems like that’s been Jenny and my motto since our big scare a little more than a month ago. Y’all have been so wonderful to us since Jenny’s hospitalization, with your patience with my running back and forth between here and Clarksville, with your cards and notes and produce and phone calls, and even with a visit from our own “Thelma and Louis” this past week. As I assume all of you know at this point, Jenny is kind of grounded while we’re waiting for her meds to melt away that sizable blood clot in her heart. As Susan and Marty can attest, Jenny’s not an invalid or confined to the house, or anything. But between her weakened heart, the medications to slow everything down, and my dear bride’s default high-worry mode, Jenny just doesn’t have a whole lot of energy, and we want her to stay close to her doctors until we can get things resolved.

Our visit to the cardiologist Friday was positive. He said Jenny was doing what she should be doing, and he’s confident we’re making progress. But he wants to give it just a bit more time before he takes the next steps. We finally have set an appointment for another look into her heart on September 1, Tuesday two weeks from now. If, as the doctor suspects will be the case, and we most fervently *pray* will be the case, if the clot is gone, he will use those paddle things we’ve all seen in TV ERs to shock Jenny’s heart back into a healthy rhythm, and finally put her on the road to repairing her weakened ticker. We very much feel your love and support, and we appreciate your continued prayers in these next couple of weeks.

In the meantime, and probably as part of our new “normal,” we continue to follow the Apostle’s mandate, being *careful* how we live. Aside from the geographic complications, one of the toughest parts of adapting our lifestyle has been changing our *diet*. Now, I have to admit that I am really only following it when I’m with Jenny, but we have spent a good deal of our time together in the last month or so trying to figure out how we can be more heart-healthy in our diet. One look at either of us is enough to know that we haven’t over the years paid enough attention to the sodium-laced, empty calorie, processed *junk* of our commuter lifestyle. But most of you who have been on the receiving end of Jenny’s wonderful cooking, so you know that we have *also* had to do, and *continue* to do, a *lot* of modification from or the bacon-fat-based cooking style Jenny learned from her Granny’s knee (mumble mumble) decades ago.

Among the bazillion other thoughts that have been crowding my noggin here lately, one of the things that occurred to me on yesterday’s run of the *Pennyrile 100* was that for just about as long as Jenny and I have been thinking in earnest about *our* diet, Jesus has been just as earnest about *our* diet. Though I have been trying to stick with the Epistle lessons for my sermons lately, perhaps you’ve noticed that, ever since they took up the leftovers from the feeding of the five thousand, our *Gospel* lessons have been talking about bread, and yesterday it occurred to me how that’s related to Paul’s message to be careful about how we live.

Of course when we hear Jesus talking about bread, being good Episcopalians and all, we immediately think of the Eucharist. We think of Holy Communion and the bread and wine that represent Jesus giving his life for us. But when Jesus is going on and on here about being the “Bread of life,” and the “Bread from heaven,” and the “Bread for the life of the world,” he hasn’t even *gotten* to the last supper yet. It’s tempting, especially among those of us for whom Communion is such an integral part of our worship – of our lives – to simply fold all this bread talk into Communion and be done with it.

But at seventy-something miles per hour yesterday, it occurred to me that Jesus is saying something *more* than the so-familiar Eucharistic words of institution. You see, nowadays, we have so *much* that we use bread as an extra, off to the side, something to hold up the butter. But when Jesus was

talking about thing the “Bread of life,” the “Bread from heaven,” the “Bread for the life of the world,” he was talking to people that are bread to *survive*. Jesus was saying, “I am the *main* course.”

What came before was good, he says. That bread that the Father provided to his people through Moses got them through the wilderness, and the law and the prophets provided some nourishment through even tougher times. But it was the *appetizer* course. Jesus is saying that *he* is the meat and potatoes for our souls, the *substance* of the meal, the food that fills us up and nourishes us for life. Jesus is what *really* feeds us and gives us life. *Jesus* is the main course.

There is *so* much to feed on in the busy-ness of this modern life. There’s always something to accomplish, always something to accumulate. There’s always some competition, at work, or at play. There’s always, *always* the blue-glow, talking head, social-networked, streaming info, info, info, twenty-four, seven. And let’s face it, there’s so much to feed on in the busy-ness of the *church* as well. There’s always studies and classes. There are fellowship and activities. There are retreats and anniversaries and rallies and picnics. All those things are wonderful, but at best they are just the soup and the salad, the side-dishes and the deserts, and some of it is even just the *junk* food of our lives. Especially here in the church, we need to remember that *Jesus* is the main course.

And naturally, that is, because it’s in our nature – not the nature for which we were created, mind you, but our nature since Chapter 3 of the story – naturally, as I was saying, instead of a nourishing meal, we so often like to gnaw on our favorite tough, gristly bone of contention, don’t we? We battle it out in classrooms or courtrooms, on *Springer* or *Maurry*, on the editorial page or in the comments section. And of course, there’s no place like *church* to worry and fret over the latest pronouncement, the hottest argument, the *au currant* juicy controversy. There’s nobody like one of the family to serve roasted up with a meaty little tidbit of gossip, or half-truth, or innuendo. You see, there’s no nutrition in any of that, no substance, no life – just bile and reflux. *Jesus* is the main course.

Finally, we all know that to be nourished by bread you have to consume it. It does no good at all to go to the Sureway, or the Shnuck’s, or the Publix, and stare at the beautiful bakery case, to stand and admire the ciabatta, or the French loaf, or the sourdough, and then walk away. For bread to do any good, you have to let it become *part* of you. Too often we try to keep Jesus at arms’ length. We *want* to know Jesus. We want to *love* Jesus. We want Jesus to be part of our lives... but only if we can keep him from actually changing our diet. Jesus is not the extra salt to make the filler seem a little bit like nutrition, to make the worthless substitutes taste more like the real thing. Don’t you see, if Jesus is going to nourish you, if he is going to sustain you, if he is going to fill you up, then the first thing you have to do, the very *first* thing you have to do, is to let him in. Because Jesus *is* the main course.

Do you find that you grow weak spiritually? Do feel nervous and jittery because your soul is running on empty? Maybe you need to sit down for a bit, push aside the on-the-go junk, pull yourself up to the table, and *feast* on the *main* course. “This is the bread which came down from heaven,” Jesus says, “he who eats this bread will live for ever.”

“Be careful,” Paul says, “how you live.”