

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a
Psalms 51:1-13
Year B, 9th Sunday of Pentecost

Ephesians 4:1-16
John 6:24-35
August 2, 2009

Back to the Beginning

Sometimes we have to start at the beginning. We need to go to the start of chapter six of the Gospel of John. In just one verse, we receive a small clue from the writer, “Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.” (John 6:4) We are supposed to go back and remember the whole point of the Passover, the great feast of liberation. John wants us to recall the story of Moses leading Israel out of bondage through God’s power. We are supposed to think of God’s action in calling Moses to go to Pharaoh and proclaim, “Let my people go!” We should remember 10 deadly plagues, the march to the Red Sea, the parting of the Sea, and, yes, the destruction of the greatest army on Earth at the time. Despite this incredible, world-altering moment of God’s action in the history of a people, they complain and yes, they forgot about God! With the water and food running out, they complain to Moses. Moses follows the rules and barks up the ladder, complaining to God. The result is one of the most beautiful in all of scripture. God opens the storerooms of heaven and it rains down manna, the very bread of angels. God chooses to feed the people from God’s very hand.

Sometimes we have to start at the beginning. We need to go back before this morning’s Gospel passage and hear again last week’s feeding of the five thousand! Jesus teaches and preaches and heals. Quite a group begins to follow-him. In fact, they follow him across a sea. When they get to the other side, the group becomes tired and hungry. The disciples do not know what to do. All they have is two fish and five loaves of bread. If you recall, those words in Greek are double-diminutives so really, Jesus had a couple of sardines

and five crackers. He blesses them and the people receive a feast. They eat until they are full and satisfied and sitting on the hills enjoying the weather and likely taking a nap. Twelve baskets are gathered of just the crumbs from this celebration! The people worry about food. The teacher they follow feeds them. So, they follow him with even greater purpose. They begin to press forward and wonder and pressure Jesus. The result is somewhat startling, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” (John 6:26) Jesus rebukes them, not because they are hungry. He grows impatient and begins teaching because they forgot about God!

Of course, if we are honest, we do the same thing. We get busy. Life interferes in our desire to pray, to volunteer, to help others, even just to make it to everything on our lists. We end up focusing on the wrong thing. We end up paying more attention to the career or friends or what is on TV than to God. We forget and focus on a result and not the beginning.

It reminds me of the story of a kindergartner who was practicing spelling with magnetic letters on the refrigerator: cat, dog, dad, and mom had been proudly displayed for all to see. One morning while getting ready for the day, he bounded into the room with his arms outstretched. In his hands were three magnetic letters: G-O-D. “Look what I spelled, Mom!” with a proud smile on his face.

“That's wonderful!” his mom praised him. “Now go put them on the fridge so Dad can see when he gets home tonight.” The mom happily thought that her son's Catholic education was certainly having an impact. Just then, a little voice called from the kitchen: “Mom? How do you spell ‘zilla?’”

Just like that kindergarten child, we have something else on our mind than God. Jesus is not mad that the people following him are hungry. He is

frustrated that they forgot about God! They just witnessed a miracle and still could not open their hearts and minds enough to focus on God. The resulting conversation is born from that concern and frustration, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” (John 6: 27) Stop focusing on your ham sandwich or even on your sardines and crackers, focus on the one who provides it all to you.

The amazing response from those gathered is to ignore everything again. They go back part way but not far enough. They sit back and remember the stories of Moses leading them in the wilderness. They begin thinking in terms of Jesus as a prophet or leader. So they turn and make a ridiculous request, “Fine, Jesus, if you are the big leader, give us a sign. After all, Moses gave people manna to eat in the wilderness.” Having just seen five thousand people fed from almost nothing, they still want a sign. They are still so focused on food, they forgot about God!

Jesus has to remind them of the true nature of the story. Go back to the beginning! It was not Moses who fed Israel but God! Go back to the beginning and pay attention to the whole story. It is God who created the heavens and the earth! It is God who brought you out of bondage! It is God who fed you with the very bread of angels! Can you not remember the great Passover prayer, “Blessed are you, Lord God, king of the universe- the one who brings forth bread from the earth!” God literally provides the very bread of remembrance!

Go back to the beginning! Moses asks for God’s name and receives the response, “I AM who I AM!” God is the great “I AM.” It is in this context of the great I AM feeding his people that Jesus says, in effect, “Go back to the beginning! I AM the bread of life. I AM is the one who feeds you. I AM is

the one who loves you. I AM all that you need. I AM the bread of life that will sustain you long after any meal has been eaten. Only when we take the time to draw together these strands can we begin to hear what Jesus is saying, can we begin to understand the bold proclamation in this seemingly simple exchange. Jesus is saying to those gathered, to those who will listen, to all of us gathered in worship this morning, “I AM the great I AM! And I AM all that you need, from the very beginning to right now.” God, in Christ, is the bread of life and is all that we need.

AMEN.