

St James the Fisherman
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 19, 2018
Proper 15/Year B

Proverbs 9:1-6
Psalm 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20
John 6:51-58

Thank you dear Wisdom for setting for us the Table of Life. Amen

Let's begin with a short poem from a collection by Naomi Shihab Nye, *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, poems of the Middle East:

“Some people place their whole bodies
inside a dream.
A woman steps out of a dream
with fresh almonds wrapped in a towel,
holding them out
to any open mouth.”

I want us to think of the gospel passage this morning as the “Jesus dream.”

Jesus has a dream for us, full of love and life, full of hope, full of risk and pain, full of tears and laughter.

This dream is alive; it's real; it's a heartbeat.

This dream is telling us what Mary Oliver reminds us in the opening lines of her poem, “Wild Geese”:

“You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.”

This morning in our verses in the middle of chapter six of the Gospel of John, Jesus walks into his dream for us. He believes in his dream for us. Right down to his flesh and blood.

Can you get any closer?

“Eat my flesh. Drink my blood. I will abide in you. You will abide in me.” Boundaries are obliterated; Jesus defends this act of intimacy, even to the death. All for the sake of a dream.

Jesus walks into his dream, and then he walks out, and like the woman with almonds, he too is wrapped in a towel, in his loin cloth, and offers us food: take, eat; take, drink.

And what is the dream that Jesus has for us?

I think it's quite simple, and of course in its simplicity, profound:

Love God and do what you want. Find your deep seated desire, planted by God's grace, right in the middle of your gut, and follow it, trust it, believe in it, fight for it. And know that in all of it you're making meaning. And whether you "fail or succeed," you are giving to the world. And in the process, you too, like Jesus, are becoming life-sustaining bread, feeding the deep-seated hunger that plagues our world.

Fourth century, Augustine of Hippo knew this when he said, "If you really love God, then of course you can do what you want."

Jesus' dream is wrapped in the freedom of our flesh and blood.

Flesh and blood for the ancients was an idiom for the "whole person"- the heart, mind, body and soul.

Our gospel writer does not use the word Body, but rather "flesh." Flesh and Blood. Neither does he use the word Eat or Consume; our translation actually domesticates/sanitizes the message. Rather, he uses the word "munch, chew."

"Just chomp on Jesus." It's startling, upsetting, shocking even, to us, as well as to the ancients. Cannibalistic, polemical, even obscene.

When I was working as a hospital chaplain in the thoracic unit, one of the heart surgeons asked me if I wanted to join him and view an open heart surgery- those were the days that veins were taken from legs and transplanted into the heart. I might as well have been on the moon; it was all so other-worldly. A team of surgeons and nurses, a vice that cracked open the patient's chest and cranked it wide open, a machine pulsing the blood through the body, classical music blasting and the lead heart surgeon, my host, barefoot.

When I asked him later why he operated barefoot, he told me that he was entering into the most sacred place- the human heart, and to do what he was going to do was obscene, it was so intimate. He wanted to honor that invasion, by being grounded to the solar plexus of the earth, to the hot center of the world, as best he could. "Sometimes it takes obscene acts to save lives; I want to be grounded in my humility."

An echo of this morning's gospel is when Jesus says to Thomas, "Put your finger her and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put in my side." Caravaggio has captured this

scene with the intense light of Thomas sticking his finger into Jesus' side (his solar plexus), all guided by Jesus hand.

So intimate, so obscene. And in it, Thomas can *now* reply, "My Lord, and my God."

I think this freedom Jesus offers us of intimacy and meaning, is revealed best through our wounds, our failings, our limitations. The inherent poverty of our human condition.

A friend I've known for over 30 years, Joe Duggan, was visiting me a couple of weeks ago. His wife, Stefani Schatz, Canon to the Ordinary, in San Francisco died a year ago. And he is working his way through his grief. Joe is also an Episcopal priest, once a Jesuit, has lived his life in service. He has a congenital tremor- his hands tremble, especially when he is eating and drinking. His mother had him when she was 48, a miraculous birth, and Joe sees the tremor as a sign and remembrance of that miracle.

And yet his tremor has also been difficult- embarrassing, annoying, even shaming. He was on my porch and we were having a glass of wine, when a bumble bee showed up. A bee, and a glass of wine and a tremor are a bad mix. I grabbed the wine, shooed the bee, all in a relaxed and fluid, take-for-granted, movement. And Joe sighed,

"The tremor is getting worse. There's this new treatment, with ultra sound, and the doctors think that they can cure the tremor... 100% erase it, actually in a manner of hours. I'm kind of hesitant, though."

"Why?"

"This body thing, this annoyance, is a visible reminder of the paradoxical beauty of all our imperfections. (that's really how he talks). It's given me patience for the humanity of others and for my humanity to show up... I wait easier, to listen and to see. Its involuntary nature reminds me of my involuntary fragility. It allows me to get deep. I'm not my tremor, but I'm not my successes either. I'm a wonderful mix of God and man, (we all are) and it's easy to forget- the tremor reminds me. I don't want to lose the reminder that takes me back to the freedom of who I really am."

We are who we really are when we choose to live within the intimacy of life-giving Jesus-bread, which comes in lots of different shapes and sizes, which is all about having the courage, as Jesus did, to embrace, fully, the inherent poverty of the human condition. In the embrace of that poverty, that humility, God reaches in and resurrects us continuously.

And that's where life resides. It's why Jesus came to show us the way. As fully man, and in his failures and in his dying, he became the Bread of Life. We too can become this bread and feed a world that is desperately hungry. AMEN