

“How Personal Does He Get?”

John 6:35-51

13 August 2006

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

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³⁵Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” ⁴¹Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴²They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” ⁴³Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Prayer.

What makes you you? What is it about yourself that makes you uniquely you? Is it your body- composed of gender and gene, size and shape, color and complexion, ethnicity and national origin, age and energy, illness or disease?

If the occasion was your funeral and I was the preacher, and I asked the assembled family, friends, and loved ones “in a word or two, how would you described the deceased?” what would be the response?

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“Oh, she was a fat, bald lady,” one may chide in, “who emigrated here in her youth from Poland.” Or, “he was the string bean who never understood the word 'rest,' worked all his life and never took a day off.”

Perhaps we are more than just a body, a mannequin upon which we simply hang our cloths, a moving hat rack upon which we rest our cap.

Is what makes you uniquely you the fact that we are the summation of all our earthly experiences? Is it our achievements and awards, our places we've visited and the sights we've seen, the degrees we've earned and the jobs we've held, the credentials we so proudly post by our name, the schedules we've balanced, and ceremonies we've attended?

“Oh, yes, I know her. She is the one who raised 5 children, went back to school to earn her degree, and became partner in her firm.” Or, “he is a member of the Board, who commuted everyday to work by driving 150 miles round trip.” I know that I am more than just a pastor, a seminary graduate, who has served four appointments in the past 21 years.

It appears as if there is still something missing. We are more than people of experience, of memories, and reputation. These may be important parts of the puzzle, but they fail to paint a complete mosaic that adequately describes the person.

Perhaps one of the necessary components that makes you uniquely you is the company you keep; the people you've met and associate with, the friends you hold dear and enjoy being around, the spouse you love, the children you are raising or have raised, the mentors whom God has graciously sent your way.

For example, to know me is to know that I am the son of Buckey and Alice, brother of Steve, Cindy, and Bryan, husband of Cynthia and father of Nicholas and Christian. To also know me is to know Herb Larson, my Sunday school teacher, Dr. Radigan, my high school physics teacher, Si Meyers, the college professor who taught me non-linear geometry. To know me is to know that there was a man by the name of Fred Owens, a resident of the hospital and nursing home where I worked as a teenager, who greatly influenced by life. Another was Tom and Anna Riddler, members of my fathers parish.

To know me is to know that I learned the essential tools of theology at the feet of Tyron Inbody, crisis intervention and psychiatric assessments from Thomas Rueth, how to do a funeral from Jack Armstrong, and how to preach from Kendal Kane McCabe. To know me is to know that my life intersects with blessed people

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like Sharon and Ruthellen, Emily Scheil, Kathy Powers, and Don Turk. To know me is to know that my life revolves around the people of Zion, the people of the Alzheimer's Association, and all the good people I serve. In short, to know me is to know the company I keep.

Our person, our experiences, our company; all lend themselves to the richness of life, to the quality of life that we are privileged to lead. But there is one last thing missing. The clues; the evidence of that last remaining piece of the pie can be found in our Gospel lesson for this morning.

"I am the bread of life." Jesus begins, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." He continues, "This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day."

Perhaps the final component of what makes you uniquely you is a personal relationship with God, and in our case, as Christians, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Listen to the language- Jesus is the bread, which we eat. We consume, and in the process, we assume the Body, we become the Body of Christ, at work, fulfilling God's Will, in the world today.

In Christianity today, far too much emphasis is placed, far too much attention is directed, towards the second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself tells us directly – his mouth to our ears – that none of us know when this will take place. Not one of us are given inside knowledge. There is no secret code in Ezekiel, Daniel, or Revelations; so we should always be prepared for the Savior's eminent return.

With all this attention on the second coming, rapture, apocalypse, end of the world, and all the half-baked garbage of these self-appointed "moral majority" "Christian conservatives," we fail to pay attention to the Jesus who is in our midst. The indictment is found in Matthew 25: 44-45, "Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'"

A personal relationship with Jesus Christ begins with outreach and mission, taking care of the least, the lost, the most vulnerable members of society; because that is where we meet Jesus. The bread and cup of Holy Communion are only symbols of Christ, but to meet him and truly know him, we must follow the exam-

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ple of Jesus, live our lives as Jesus lived his, acting with a compassionate heart and passion for others; actively expressing a desire to end injustice and oppression, challenging the powers and powerful of this world, sometimes even in confrontational ways.

Christ is found in our relationship with others, when all things are working for good through Him.

Likewise, Christ is absent in those relationships that are built on all things sinful or evil; the lies of deception, the dis-ingenuous smile and a knife in the back, the exploitation others, the self-absorption and wanton consumption of resources, the ascension to the top by treading on the dead bodies of those you've conquered, burning every bridge you've ever crossed.

Christ is found in our relationship with others, when all things are working for good through Him, as the apostle Paul so correctly observes.

Our daily bread serves as a gentle reminder of how important and personal is a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not academic, philosophical, or even emotional. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is very real, fresh, and alive in those aware enough, and faithful enough, to know that we are the Body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

Dearly beloved, take with you this day, a new and greater awareness of the relationships you keep in your life, how you might be known in the larger community, and the presence (or absence) of Jesus Christ in your life. Where is it that you are at, and where is it that Christ is calling you to go?

The word of the Lord, as it has come to me this day. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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