

August 6, 2006 Is it good to seek Jesus?

Why would it be good to seek Jesus?

He is the Son of God.

He is the way the truth and the life.

He is the Good shepherd.

He is the living water.

He is the gate.

He is the way to eternal life.

And in our reading from Today. **He is the Bread of life.**

The Bread of life makes us think of Daily Bread. Jesus taught us to pray: **give us this day our daily bread.**

Daily bread as Luther would say. **includes everything needed for this life, such as food and clothing, home and property, work and income, a devoted family, an orderly community, good government, favorable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbors.**

All these things and more are reasons it is good to seek Jesus.

Why would it be bad to seek Jesus? Is there anytime when seeking after Jesus may not be a good thing?

zeteo is the greek word for seek. In the gospel of John it is most often used, to refer to the Jews seeking to kill (or arrest) Jesus: 5:18; 7:1, 11?, 19, 20, 25, 30; 8:37, 40; 10:39; 11:8. Sometimes seeking after Jesus may not be a good thing -- one may be seeking to do him harm.

These days it may not be possible to physically harm Jesus so these days is there ever a time when it is not good to seek Jesus?

When I was in Kenya Africa with Lutheran Youth Encounter we were staying with some missionaries. These missionaries were working with the Samburu people who are cousins to the Massai people. These people live the same way they have lived for thousands of years. They are primarily sheep, cattle goat herders. They are semi nomadic. They follow the pastures so their sheep and cattle can eat.

Some of the Samburu would come to the mission compound. They would come to the missionary's for bible study to learn about Jesus. One day no one showed up. I asked where are they? The missionary said O the catholic priest is in town giving out food. So today they are catholic. The food they ate was maize.

The missionaries have noticed this phenomenon. In Africa it would be maize Christians, in Asia it would be Rice Christians. I don't know what they would be called in the US maybe success Christians. In other words the people follow the Christians to get what they wanted -- to fill their bellies. No too unlike the story we have in the gospel for today. You remember that Jesus feed 5,000 men plus the women and children with five barley loaves and two fish. The crowds were so impressed that they chased Jesus down and tried to make him a king. Jesus knew that they just wanted their bellies full. They didn't want a king to serve they wanted a king to serve them.

THE BELLY (Brian Soffergan)

The image of "the belly" is one of the things that can get in the way of really discovering Jesus. The "belly" can refer to:

(1) the literal filling up of their bellies like we have in our reading

(2) the symbolism of being centered on self

(a) the attitude of seeking Jesus to satisfy one's selfish desires

(b) the attitude of "wanting to do it myself" -- working for what I get

The main point is being centered on your self. Another term could be original sin. We don't want God to be God. We want to be God. We don't want Jesus to be in control, we want to be in control.

So the problem we have is that we are belly centered. Self centered. When we seek Jesus we don't seek the true Jesus the Jesus that is our Lord and Savior. We seek the Jesus that will meet our needs and desires. We seek the Jesus of our Belly.

Have you ever heard people say, "I am looking for a church that meets my needs", "I left that church because I wasn't getting fed."

How often have you heard people say, I left that church because they wouldn't let me serve Jesus?

If we look back at our reading for today. They seek Jesus, Jesus says they are there not because they saw the signs. In other words Jesus' miracle of feeding the 5000 was a sign that pointed to Jesus. They didn't really want Jesus they wanted the bread, they wanted their belly full.

Jesus wants them to stop following the desires of their bellies and follow Jesus.

Jesus wants you and me to stop following the desires of our bellies. Yes he is the Bread of life. Yes he gives us food and clothing; home and family and all we need from day to day. But he wants us to stop following or seeking him to fill our bellies. Jesus wants us to trust and follow him. So we pray that Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to him. Let us pray.

Gracious God, turn our hearts so that we would desire and trust you with our whole life.

August 20, 2006 Real Presence

These days experience is king and it's not just the youth but many people of all ages

believe that they will only believe something if they experience it. So it is in faith

circles. Many of us crave a God experience.

For all the bad press Doubting Thomas gets it turns out, he might be many people's patron saint. Remember when Thomas was missing and Jesus appeared to the other disciples?

Then in (John 20:25) So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Like Thomas many people won't believe unless they experience it and can understand it.

Father Andrew Greeley tells the **story of a young college student who had trouble believing in Jesus really being present in Holy Communion because he couldn't see it he couldn't understand it. I translated Father Greeley's story into Lutheran.**

a young college student went to the Newman chaplain and said, Pastor, I believe in God and in life after death and in resurrection and in the church, but I cannot accept that Jesus is really present, body and blood, soul and divinity in the bread and wine of Holy communion. I'm sorry, but I just can't.

The pastor thought this was like swallowing the grizzly bear and straining at the gnat.

Resurrection, he said, is a humungous miracle. Real Presence is kind of ordinary in comparison. I don't believe I really eat Jesus, the young man said. It's just bread that's all.

You don't eat Jesus, the pastor replied. The pastor went through a lot of theological

explanations which did not satisfy the young man. I just have to understand how he works it out, the young man pleaded. Have you figured out how God created the universe from nothing in the snap of a finger, the pastor said. Of course not the young man replied. Then his voice faded off. Oh, I get it, he said softly. I'm not supposed to understand everything.

Believe it or not the question of Jesus' presences in Holy Communion was at the heart of the argument between two of the Reformation heavy weights.

You have probably heard of Martin Luther but you may not have heard of Ulrich Zwingli. Luther the German reformer, Zwingli the Swiss. Luther holding on to the mystery of God. Zwingli a much more simple and literal theology.

In the church especially in the Lutheran church we think of the reformation as it effected the church but the reformation was not just about religion and theology. Remember there was no such thing as separation between church and state in Europe. The Church was very much in the thick of politics and power.

Philip of Hesse (1504-1567), the Landgrave of Hesse, understood the political benefits of an alliance with Switzerland, as did the Swiss. The Protestant states in their infancy were, after all, trying to survive beneath the cloud of Catholic Europe; the leaders of these states understood their precarious position since they were surrounded on all sides by hostile countries.

An alliance between the German and Swiss states, as intelligent as this was politically, foundered on the theological dispute between Luther and Zwingli. In order for the two states to ally themselves, the two Protestant churches had to agree on basic theology, particularly the theology of the nature of Christ. Luther believed that Jesus was wholly God and wholly man, thus the two natures of Christ.

Zwingli just believed that Christ was divine not also human.

In October, 1529, Philip invited both Luther and Zwingli to his castle in Marburg to hash out their differences. The two men, however, had very little in common, and their discussions ended in failure. Luther, for his part, thought Zwingli to be mad, a religious fanatic who had lost touch with common sense and spirituality. Zwingli, for his part, thought Luther to be hopelessly enmeshed in unsupportable Catholic doctrine. Their meeting in Marburg itself represents the last point in the Reformation at which the movement could have preserved some unity. After Marburg, unification of the various Protestant movements became impossible, and the new church, which Luther believed would become another, more pure universal church, fragmented into a thousand separate, quarrelling pieces within a few decades.

Luther and Zwingli's different beliefs in the nature of Christ was very obvious in their view of the Holy Communion.

The Lutheran view is termed real presence. The Lutheran view is very similar to the catholic view both believe Jesus is really present in Holy Communion, however, Roman Catholics believe that the bread and wine after being consecrated by the priest turns into the body and blood of Christ. Even though you can't see or taste the difference. Luther said Christ is "in with and under", in other words the bread stays bread the wine stays wine. Christ is there some how but it is a mystery we can't and don't have to understand.

Zwingli simply said, It's just a symbol. Jesus can't be there because he is sitting at the right hand of the father and can't be in two places at once. Zwingli said it's only a memorial in remembrance of Christ.

We Lutherans would say that poor Zwingli is really missing out on the benefits of the supper.

Jesus said, **I 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."

Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink

my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my

flesh is true food and

my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

NRSV

Jesus talks of flesh eating and blood drinking. It is easy to read those words in the gospel of John without it affecting us because we have read them many times. But if I just say let's eat some flesh and drink some blood that sounds pretty gross especially today.

I remember in my family growing up we enjoyed meat cooked rare or medium rare. In my family going up if the meat didn't have any color or blood in it we thought it was dry. I remember my father even eating raw hamburger meat.

Now my Dad with all the problems with meat won't eat anything unless it's well done.

So eating flesh drinking blood is gross and offensive. So it was back in Jesus time. But God has a knack for using

something gross and offensive and making it into something good. God took Jesus suffering and death, Jesus was beaten put on a cross to die and God turned it into something wonderful, resurrection and new life. Here God takes eating flesh and blood and turns it into a wonderful blessing.

He turns it into a God experience. He turns it into an opportunity to be with God. He turns it into an opportunity to be forgiven by God, right here right now.

Think about this. When we eat something or drink something our body takes that in. Some of it goes out of our body. We won't talk about that. But our body takes in the nutrients and puts it into our blood stream. The blood stream takes it all around our body, to every cell of our body.

Think about this. We come to communion we eat the bread and wine and some

how Jesus is in there. You can't taste it or see it but some how in with and under the bread and wine Jesus comes into our body. He goes into our blood stream and goes to every cell in our body.

You want a God experience? We talk about having Jesus in our heart. How about have Jesus in every cell of our body. How's that for a God experience?

May the peace of God that passing all understanding keep you keep you in his grace and his grace in you. Amen.