

Proper 14B
Ephesians 4:25-5:2
The Rev. Susan Plucker

1 Kings 19:4-8
John 6:35, 41-51
August 8, 2021

Our scripture readings begin this morning with
The prophet Elijah alone and literally exhausted to death.

Elijah has been battling for God against the dark forces
Of Queen Jezebel and her priests of the god Baal.
Elijah and God have won. The priests of Baal are all dead
AND Queen Jezebel is ready to kill Elijah.

Elijah say to God: "Enough already. Just take me now."
And what happens? Elijah falls asleep.
An angel comes with food.
Elijah eats the food provided
And goes on in strength for 40 more days to Horeb
Where he has another encounter with God.
But that is another story.

God provides—That is not a new message for us.
But I do believe it is one we are apt to forget,
As I did the other Saturday morning
While beginning this sermon
and getting a message from my son
Regarding a serious change in his life.

My first response was fear and uncertainty
Rushing into the "what ifs" of the future.

Over the years, have you noticed that
In our three year reading cycle of lessons
The Gospel of John doesn't have its own designated year
As Mark, Luke and Matthew do?
We read from John every year during the Easter season
And then for other short periods, as we are doing right now.

By the time this Gospel was written, oh...about 100CE
Christian communities were maturing and bringing in converts.
It is thought that the Gospel of John
Was used as a catechism for those new converts and for the entire community
To remind them of the foundation of their faith
And the source of their strength...
Not themselves, but God as revealed through the crucified and risen Christ.

From Paul's letters

We can easily infer that this being a new kind of community

Based on following the way of Jesus was not easy.

If it was he would not have had to write to group in Ephesus as sternly as he did.

As we review Paul's words,

consider that Paul did not know Jesus, had not experienced his presence.

He did not have the written gospels to study...

We are a long ways from having any kind of established authoritative scripture.

After his conversion experience, he probably heard verbal accounts

Regarding Jesus, read writings, letters, circulating at that time...

What Paul writes to the fledging community in Ephesus

Is so radical for his time

Still, so hard for us to really grasp.

I'm not sure we really want to grasp it most of the time.

Paul, the one who never experienced Jesus in the flesh

Eloquently onveys to the Jesus followers of his time and our time:

We are members of one another.

Part of the same body---

He's speaking of the body of Christ...

Jesus said he was in each of us and each of us in him.

We are members of one another

Paul reminds them...

And this is what that needs to look like.

Stop lying to one another.

Anger is going to happen,

But don't hold on to it.

Seek forgiveness, reconciliation, make amends.

Stop stealing.

And why should the thieves stop stealing?

Notice, Pauls doesn't say to stop because its wrong.

He says to work honestly so that you have something to share with the needy!

We are members of one another.

One body.

Liers, thieves, the needy.

Only speak what is useful for building up.

Not to get gold stars in heaven...

But to give grace.

To give God' grace from you to those to whom you speak.

Wow!!!!

So difficult to fully comprehend.
Still...centuries later

We are one body---a little bit of Christ in each one of us
To be shared, expressed, given away to one another.

I want to do a little word study with you
From our Gospel lesson.

You've been hearing and will continue to hear for a couple more week
About Jesus' teaching regarding being the Bread of life,
The living bread that came down from heaven.
"who ever eats of this bread, will live forever
And this bread that I give for the life of world
Is my flesh, my body.

There are two Greek words for the concept of my flesh, my body.
Jesus' Aramaic speaking was translated into written Greek
As was the custom of that time.

The two words are *soma* and *sarx*.

The Greek word "soma" refers to the human person in so far as the person is good or neutral.
According to my source, Ronald Rolheiser in his book The Holy Longing:

"If Robert Burn's famous line, 'a body meet a body/coming through the rye'
Had been sung by the Greek authors of the New Testament,
They would have given it a voice in this way:
'Gin a soma meet a soma/coming through the rye...'"

Sarx, the other Greek word for body
Always refers to the human person perjoratively, negatively.
It refers to the human person insofar as there is something
Unfavorable about him or her.

Thus, again quoting my reference:
I am a sarx insofar as I get sick, have bodily smells, sin and die
But I am a soma insofar as I am healthy, attractive,
Do virtuous things and even rise from the dead.
Greeks loved dualistic thinking.

So, which word do you think is used to speak of Jesus,
The bread of life, the bread of the world,
a body to be broken and eaten.

Soma?
Sarx?

Its SARX!

I even looked up verse 51 in Greek...

The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my *sark*.

Can you begin to understand why people

Had such a difficult time hearing and comprehending these words at first?

Given this background,

Perhaps we can begin to realize that

With a lot of help from the Holy Spirit

And the disciples' and early followers of Jesus'

Life giving, life-changing experiences of Christ among them;

Those early followers, especially Paul

Knew and spoke of The Body of Christ

Not just as the person of the historical Jesus

And not just as the real presence of God in the eucharist,

But more importantly as the concrete, real, alive, diverse, body of believers

Right in front of them and scattered in small pockets all around the Mediterranean

Body of Christ:

Historical Jesus

Real presence of God in the eucharist

Concrete, historical body of believers on earth,

Including themselves and us.

We are not being asked to eat a sterilized, white or wheat communion wafer

We are not being asked to believe that that wafer

Represents a sinless, glorified body in heaven.

What we are being asked to eat, to partake of

To be strengthened and nourished by

is the body of Christ.

Including the flawed body of believers here on earth.

Yikes!

Do you still want to come to communion today?

In essence,

Jesus is saying:

Eternal life, life with God includes all of everything

All of everyone, the good, the bad, the ugly

All the less-than-perfect, less-than-forgiving and less-than-understanding

Communities here on earth.

How many times have you wanted to say:

“I’m out of here!”

Maybe you have said it.

Elijah did. Seems to me Jonah did also.

I’m out of here, running the other direction, ready to die.

Dead tired of putting up with your crazy people, God.

Jesus says:

Unless you eat my flesh, my SARX

You cannot have life within you.”

Don’t run away. You’ll miss the best part.

This teaching is very clear in John’s gospel

And it come to us as preparation before we return

To the Gospel of Mark to learn again about the demands of ministry.

But for now and the next couple of Sundays,

It is enough to work at grasping the reality of God among us.

Again the message is:

God is as much a part of this flawed family of earth

As that flawless God in heaven we’d rather cling to.

God is not just in heaven

God is also on earth.

Incarnate, In fleshed, in-bodied

Soma and Sarx.

AT the center of the definition of being a Christian,

Its very essence,

Is to be together with all our human faults

And the tensions between us.

Being a Christian is always as much about dealing lovingly with each other

As it is about loving God.

And the dealing with each other is such hard work

And its exhausting and most often without reward

Sometimes dangerous, sometimes feels like we are failing

Doing it all wrong, can’t get it right.

We too, at times are ready to crawl under that broom tree

And if not die, at least hide out for awhile

And you know what the good news is?

In our exhaustion, our fear, our humanness

We might get an angel that brings us some cake

To refresh, revive, strengthen us...

But more than likely what we will get is
God in the flesh of community saying
"I am your bread; feed on me.

God in the flesh...

What might that look like?

A call from a friend

A note in the mail

An inspiring paragraph, page or chapter from someone's experience.

A kiss, a laugh, quiet time with a friend.

A refreshing nap/ a conflict resolved,

A hug, a conversation, a nod, a smile,

A simple "I'm sorry." I was wrong. Can we start over?

A Sunday worship.

A listening ear, some wise advice, a check in the mail

A silly joke, a gentle touch.

On and on and on...

God in the flesh right before our eyes, saying:

"Here is bread for you.

Feed on me."