

August 29, 2021  
Mark 7:1-8, 14,15, 21-12

Proper 17 B  
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Did you notice???

We're still talking about eating!

In June we were reading from Chapter 4 of the Gospel of Mark,  
With its two parables that refer to food  
In the form of seeds producing grain and fruit.

Chapter 6 of the Gospel of Mark  
Tells us about the feeding of the five thousand  
With 5 loaves and two fish.

As we return to Mark this morning,  
After some weeks moving through the Gospel of John  
Hearing about Jesus being the bread from heaven  
His body, his blood given to us to eat and to drink,  
the theme of eating pops up again;  
This time though in terms of an unruly conflict around rules;  
Who is right, who is wrong  
Regarding food preparation and eating.

Further on in Mark, Jesus argues with a Gentile woman,  
Using an eating metaphor:  
"It's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."  
Again, he uses a food preparation metaphor when he says to the disciples:  
"Beware the leaven of the Pharisees."

There is one more feeding miracle story;  
This time with 4000 people, 7 loaves and 2 fish.  
And our gospel narrator goes on to describe  
how the disciples did not understand the loaves.

Rules, customs, and traditions around food, food preparation and eating  
Were all topics of controversy for the early church.  
We catch some of that in the letters written by Paul as he responded  
To issues arising in the earliest Jesus communities.  
The Gospel of Mark is thought to be the first complete account written  
To help teach and guide those 1<sup>st</sup> communities through such conflicts.

We can hear a new thinking and teaching regarding all those  
Familiar (at least to them) rules, customs, and traditions  
In Jesus' response to the harangue of the Pharisees  
And then in his bold and unorthodox teaching to the crowd.

It is what is already inside of us,  
The intentions of our heart, our mind, our wills  
That can be unclean  
And when we let those intentions out, they are what defile  
And are not how God intends as to be with one another.

Jesus is speaking to a crowd.  
Mark is writing to small Jesus communities.  
A new vision is being placed before those listeners,  
The vision of how they are to be with each other as they try to follow the way of Jesus.  
Each of the vices listed centers around  
The destruction of relationships and community.

Put in a positive framework,  
Mark's vision is of a community free to sit and eat with one another,  
Male, female, Greek, slave, rich, poor, tax collector, soldier...  
Sharing at the table the meal (literally and figuratively)  
their teacher has prepared for them,  
The food that will nurture and mature this budding community of Christ.

I invite you to consider  
What has been prepared for us to eat, for us to partake of,  
To be nourished by as we worship this morning.

The first item that comes to mind is Eucharist,  
Our feast of thanksgiving,  
Sharing the bread, the wine (symbolically at least right now)  
The body and blood of the living Christ,

Second, is Holy Scripture itself...  
The word of God  
As one of my favorite collects says:  
To be heard, read, marked, learned and inwardly digested...

Third, is the prayers of our rich tradition,  
Which also includes our hymns.

And fourth is our own individual words and actions  
As we greet and talk and interact with one another.  
That is the one for which we are most responsible and accountable.

Does it surprise you to learn or to be reminded that we promise  
To take care of ourselves and each other in just this way  
At our baptism?

The first question of us in our Baptismal Covenant is:  
Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship,  
In the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

And our answer is "I will with God's help."

The expectation here is that we will need God's help  
And that we can trust in that help to be forthcoming.

Are you aware that the word creed means  
what I put my heart in, What I trust in?  
The Apostle's creed, which we still proclaim today,  
is thought to be the first simple statement  
Of faith used at the first early adult baptisms.

People saw the early followers of this new way of being community.  
They saw and experienced something different in these people's lives  
And they wanted to part of that different way of being in the world.  
They learned that the basis of that different way  
was experiencing face to face, 1<sup>st</sup> hand, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus,  
The Holy one of God, The Christ.  
And then, by living in community with those experienced people,  
Converts came to believe that they too, can put their heart in, can trust in  
This one God, who now they have come to know and name  
As Farther, Son and Holy Spirit.

What do people believe in today?  
What is their creed?  
Where do they put their trust and heart?

I really was curious as what response might be out there  
So I crafted an inquiry for Goggle and  
Was sent to a site called Quora  
Where people were asked to give examples of things  
"You trust every day with no proof."

The responses I read included:  
I trust in myself. I'm able to get of bed every morning  
and go about my day striving to avoid pain and seek pleasure.  
Friends and family.  
The earth – it keeps us grounded. We don't fly off into space.  
The sun  
My immediate surroundings.  
My mind and mode of thought.  
That our money system will work.  
Our government, at least enough so as not to leave  
God or a higher power  
A guardian angel  
Language....it works  
Time  
My mother.....

That's a far cry from:

God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer.

As Christians, we are indeed counter-cultural,  
Swimming up stream as it were,  
Not in the main flow...

And God knows that we need each other's care and support  
God abides in us, lives and moves in us and through us.  
Not me, you, I...but us.  
That is an integral message of our gospels.

We can't do it by ourselves.  
At least not and still call ourselves Christians.  
We can't strive to love and God and neighbor and be loved by God and neighbor  
In isolation.

Our being in right relationship with God  
Is dependent upon each other  
The living and the dead  
The fellowship of all believers  
The community of saints.

As I was perusing the internet,  
Regarding that topic of trust,  
I was struck by the reality of how fortunate we are  
To have these four components of our faith to nurture and inform us.  
Eucharist, Holy Scripture, tradition, community.

And I was pulled back into memories of my seminary liturgics classes  
with The Rev. Louis Weil.  
Again and again he would bring us back to the sacrament of baptism.  
I never heard him preach without speaking of that foundation of our Christian being.  
That cornerstone.

Many say human beings are born without a user's manual, a set of directions  
A blueprint to guide us along our way.

At our baptism, we are reborn in Christ with just that blueprint, all that we need  
To flourish, to thrive in Christ, with God's love, and forgiveness, and grace and wisdom  
Guiding us along the way through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sacraments are outward and visible signs  
Of the inward and spiritual reality of God.

Now we can decide that that sounds all well and wonderful  
And isn't that a nice sacrament of the church,  
Or we can decide to claim its truth and hang on for dear life  
As we attempt to live it out in today's world.

It's been another hard week in a seemingly endless series of hard weeks;  
The fall of Afghanistan with the aftermath of 13 American soldiers killed,  
The deaths and confusion and fear of many others ,  
The pandemics' rise of illness and deaths and overwhelmed health care workers,  
Confused and anxious teachers and parents  
Hurricane Ida pummeling Louisiana on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina...  
Just not fair!!!!

What can we do???

We can return to who we are and whose we are  
And hear again the basic tenants of how we are called to be in the world.

What can we do?

We can find, read, learn and inwardly digest  
the sacrament of baptism in our prayer book (page 299) or on line this week)  
and give God the opportunity to work in us.

What can we do???

With God's help we can:

Continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers.  
Persevere in resisting evil and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to God.  
Proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ.  
Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves  
Strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.

And what exactly is the help we can expect from God?

That too is part of the sacrament.

We can expect God to:

Deliver us from the way of sin and death  
Open our hearts to God's grace and truth  
Fills us with God's holy and life-giving Spirit  
Keep us in the faith and communion of God's holy church  
Teach us to love others in the power of the Spirit  
Send us into the world in witness to God's love  
Bring us to the fullness of God's peace and glory

And there is more....

A feast of words and promises  
Of loving support and hope....  
Enough to chew and digest and be formed by  
The rest of our lives.

For the final prayer is this:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon us the forgiveness of sin and have raised us to the new life of grace. Sustain us O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all of your works.

Amen.