

Eating with Our Mouths Wide Open

August 5, 2108 John 6:24-36

How many of you remember Simon and Garfunkel's song, *Mrs. Robinson*?

Originally, it was part of the soundtrack for the film, *The Graduate*, but it became one of the best-known ballads of the 1960s – and it still gets some airtime.

It has the line, “Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio, a nation turns its lonely eyes to you. What's that you say, Mrs. Robinson? Joltin' Joe has left and gone away.”

During a *60 Minutes* TV interview, songwriter Paul Simon mentioned that he received a letter from Joe DiMaggio in which he said he was befuddled over what the song means.

DiMaggio wrote, “What do you mean ‘Where have I gone?’ I haven't gone anywhere! I'm still around – I'm selling Mr. Coffee machines.”

Paul Simon smiled wryly and remarked, “Obviously Mr. DiMaggio is not accustomed to thinking of himself as a metaphor!”

That dynamic is at play throughout the Gospel of John; as matter of fact, we see it today when Jesus says, “I am the bread of life”.

And we've seen it before.

For example, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be “born again”, and all Nicodemus can do is obsess over the dimensions of women's birth canals.

He misses Jesus' metaphor of a radical reboot of life.

Everywhere he goes, Jesus has these parallel conversations.

On one level, the people take his words literally, and so miss his point and walk away frustrated.

On the other level, the reader is invited to see the metaphors in Jesus' words as signs pointing to God.

The same with his healings, his feeding of the 5,000, his raising Lazarus and such.

In John's gospel, Jesus' works are never called "miracles" – they are called "signs".

I'm sure you've heard in a wedding ceremony the traditional phrase, "the holy estate of matrimony, which Christ adorned and beautified with his first miracle in Cana of Galilee."

I don't know how many times I've spoken those words during a wedding ... but they aren't accurate.

The Greek used in John 2, *sēmeion*, where this event happened, does not say it was a miracle but a sign pointing to his divinity.

People often say that John is their favorite gospel because it is the "most spiritual" of the four.

But, experience suggests that while we prize some isolated verses, when we actually start reading through the gospel, we get lost in the long, dense, meandering monologues of Jesus.

And after wading through them, we may stare at the page mentally drained and wondering exactly what he was trying to say.

But that's a good thing.

Jesus may not give us clear three-point sermons, but his words stick around for us to marinate on.

Or to use Jesus' own words, they abide in us – which is exactly what he wants.

The crowd had been looking for Jesus ever since he slipped out of town after the astounding mass feeding – Marcia talked about that last week.

The crowd called it a meal, but Jesus meant it as a sign pointing them to God as their Source – they just weren't on the same page.

Jesus doesn't condemn them for wanting a free meal – who wouldn't?

But he taunts them for missing the obvious: from five barely loaves and two fish, Jesus fed what was probably 20,000 people, if you count women and children.

And after scarfing down their fish sandwiches, the crowd says that they want to crown him king ... leading Jesus to flee.

The history of Israel had already taught the folly of demanding a king – even one who promises wealth and security.

God had freed the slaves from Egypt, led them through the wilderness, established their homes in the land of milk and honey.

The prophet Samuel insisted that was sign enough of God's Reign, God's love, and God's protection of His people.

But the people's faith wavered, and so they demanded a human king.

1 Samuel 8:5 “... *now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.*”

Eventually God relented and Samuel anointed Saul and then David as kings, and it was downhill from that time on.

We all know where strongmen lead us.

Now Jesus faced an analogous situation.

Jesus had provided food, so the people say, hey, let's make him our king.

But Jesus is saying, look: these healings, this food, and this wisdom I teach come from God.

Wake up – pay attention to the Source of all goodness, not just the stuff itself.

John 6:27 “*Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides.*”

Alright then, the crowd says.

Tell us where to sign up for this life-long supply food, but it is clear that they are not tracking with Jesus, so he says,

John 6:35a *“I am the bread of life.*

You can imagine the crowd’s collective “Huh?”

This is the first of the seven “I AM” statements in the Gospel of John.

I am the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Gate, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way the Truth and the Life, and the Vine.

OK, fair enough, some say – what do we have to do to get this endless bread?

John 6:35b (NIV) *Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”*

The Greek, *erchomai*, that the New International Version of the bible translates as “come” means to come alongside and follow.

To get in step with.

And the Greek word translated as “believe” is *pisteuō*, which means to give ourselves or to entrust ourselves to something – in this case, to entrust ourselves to Jesus.

To “believe” is not intellectually subscribing to a set of principles – believe these seven points and you’ll get into heaven or such.

Nor is what we do as much as being open to what God is doing.

It’s asking, “What’s God up to here?”

And then, “How do I get on board?”

The Message translation combines the meaning of these two verbs – “come” and “believe” – into the one verb “align”.

John 6:35 (The Message) *Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever.*

That's pretty good.

Align is to come alongside Jesus, to make Jesus' priorities my priorities, and to do my best to see the world as Jesus sees the world – to have Jesus eyes.

How does Jesus see the world?

John 3:16 God so loved the world that he sent His Son that whoever believes (aligns with, prioritizes as) him will have eternal (blessed) life.

Eternal life as Jesus talks about it is more than just a long existence in Heaven.

Yes, that, too, but Jesus constantly taught about how to live in the here and now.

A life in the Kingdom here and now - a life of Shalom – is bringing what's up there down here.

Matthew 6:10 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in Heaven...

We don't earn a Kingdom life, but we experience a life that is blessed and that is a blessing in the here-and-now by the choices we make here-and-now.

These are choices of what we pay attention to, where we put on consciousness, where we receive our energy, how we prioritize our day.

Am I rehashing old hurts, or seeing how God used those hurts in some way?

Am I staying bitter or getting better?

Am I judging people for how smart they are, whether they are "legal", how much money they have, how much extra weight they are carrying?

Or, am I looking for their inner spirit, the soul behind their façade?

Am I isolating myself for safety, or am I risking something to help someone who's lonely, hungry or hurting?

God so loved the world - all of it.

This passage does not put any restrictions on God's love.

There's no God so loved the world *except* for gay people, *except* for Muslims, *except* for Trump supporters or *except* for Bernie Sanders supporters.

Unlike traditions built on notions of a distant god or a metaphysical concept, Christianity is earthy.

It is flesh and blood, sweat and tears, personal and loving – that is the meaning of incarnational.

God came to dwell among us.

Through Jesus, God came to roll up His sleeves and share in our labors, our heartbreaks, our joys, our cares for the world.

So, if we are going to align ourselves with Jesus, we start with loving as God loves – the real life of His creatures and His creation, and that can be messy.

The other night, Kerstynn told us about a man brought into her jail on a misdemeanor arrest he had orchestrated so that he could get dental care from prison services.

He is in so much pain that jail seemed to be his best option.

Unfortunately, they had to tell him that dental care only comes with felony convictions, and then only one tooth every six months.

What would Jesus think of this?

What would Jesus think about how one of the richest and most Christian nations in the world is allocating its resources?

I think it would break his heart because through his eyes, every person is sacred.

The divine spark that lives in each person, lives in that man – even in a meth addict who's rotted his teeth.

He is sacred and he is loved.

And, that same divine spark lives in you.

You are sacred.

You are loved, not because of what you've done, but because you are created by God.

Jesus came for you ... and all the screw ups you've made, all the times you've failed, all the judgmental thoughts you've had about others have not diminished His love for you.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and nothing you can do to make God love you less.

In John 10:10 Jesus explained, *I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.*

One of the reasons the crowds abandoned Jesus is that he demands a bold faith.

Throughout most of this "bread of life" chapter, Jesus used the typical Greek word for "to eat" *phagien*.

It's the word you'd use to say, "Johnny, eat your broccoli."

But then in the middle of his teaching (verse 54) Jesus switches to the verb *trogein*, which means "to chew with your mouth open."

Without the Greek, you miss this dramatic change of tone and message.

This would now be, "Johnny, remember your manners. We don't chew with our mouths open. Close your mouth when you chew."

That means that Jesus doesn't leave it as, "I'm the bread of life, eat my flesh," but goes further: "Chew on me, smack your lips over me, eat in a way that no one will miss what you are doing because they will be able to *see* what's in your mouth!"

Maybe we have made the sacrament of communion too tame, too mundane, too easy-to-digest!

We hear Jesus say, "This is my body broken for you," and we respond, "That's nice!" and day dream our way through the sacrament.

But the Son of God came to earth to invite us to eat his body, to ingest his essence, to feed our tired body and conflicted soul with his renewal ... and then to smack our lips so that everyone sees.

And then, to go be different in the world because of it.

Different in our spirits, different to our neighbors, different at work.