

“Thrive with Jesus’ nourishment” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
August 12, 2018, Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
John 6:35, 41-51

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

“Spiritual but not religious.” How many times have you heard a friend or family member say this? Have you been at a party and met someone new, and when you said you were a Christ-follower, that person said to you that they were spiritual but not religious? Did you ever asked that individual what their statement means? If you haven’t, next time you hear this phrase, ask what the person who utters the words means. I have and have gotten a variety of very vague answers.

Spirituality is ‘in.’ It’s the popular way to be. Many in our society seem enamored with the spiritual – whatever that means to the individual. And, if you want to develop your spirituality, there are classes and workshops that help you become more spiritual – not more Christian – more spiritual.

Even Christ-followers have to some extent joined this trend. We long to have what we call ‘mountain-top’ experiences where we feel closer to God and Jesus. Some folks spend their life working on accomplishing this feeling through prayer and meditation, fasting, self-denial – the list goes on.

What are we to make of this movement, this trend? What are those who are striving for ‘spirituality’ seeking? I believe they are seeking a closer relationship with the divine. What I find interesting about this ‘seeking a closer relationship with the divine’ is who is doing the seeking. It’s the person that is doing the seeking, not God, not Jesus, not the Holy Spirit. It’s another way that humanity puts into place rules and actions that have to be done to reach the divine. It’s a human-centered action, not God-given.

In today’s reading from John, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” Those of you who know John’s story of Jesus, know that Jesus made a number of “I am” statements. This is the first. The others? Jesus says, I am the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way the truth and the life, and the vine.

These statements of Jesus are so direct that that they may just challenge us, challenge our beliefs about who Jesus is. With such a direct statement as “I am the bread of life,” the reader or hearer is pushed to make a decision about Jesus. Do I believe this statement? Is Jesus really who he says he is?

Think about Jesus’ statement, “I am the bread of life.” Where does Jesus say the bread he provides originates? From heaven. Jesus is the bread that comes down from heaven. This means Jesus is nourishment that doesn’t originate from the earth or from our human efforts to reach the divine, to reach Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit.

In our scripture, what is the reaction of those listening to Jesus when he says he’s the bread of life? They start to grumble. They say, “**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’?**” They try to bring Jesus, the Son of God, down to their level. They cannot accept that he is from God, that he is divine.

Jesus goes on to say that no one can come to him unless that individual is drawn to Jesus by the God. No one can learn of Jesus unless that individual is taught by God. No one can see Jesus except by a revelation from God.

Where does the revelation that Jesus is God come from? From heaven, from God, not from earthly things, things we try to do to grow closer to the divine. Whatever we need to comprehend Jesus must come as a gift from God. It's not our own actions, our own practices that we devise. As Jesus says, that comprehension must come down from heaven.

So, standing before us in this scripture is God in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. For those of you who have ever wondered what God looks like or how God acts or how God talks, you need wonder no longer. We do not have to strive to be spiritual or to do this or that so that we can climb up to God, for God comes down to us. God comes to us in Jesus Christ.

Spiritual but not religious. It seems there's something in all of us that causes us to desire our god high and distant and out there just beyond our reach. Something we can control, that fits with our lives. But if you are a Christ-follower, God in Jesus Christ is not something that we always find comfortable, controllable. In this scripture, we have God in Jesus saying something that challenges us, maybe makes us uncomfortable. **"I am the bread of life, feed on me."**

As you think about today's scripture this coming week, just consider these questions. Can it be that your nourishment, your bread and wine, is Jesus, the one standing before you in this scripture? Is Jesus the nourishment you need?

There's a phenomenon among babies and infants called "failure to thrive." This can happen when newborns or infants have their physical needs met, but do not respond normally. It may be that the bond between child and caregiver isn't strong enough. Often orphans raised in institutions with staff who cannot pay attention to each individual child suffer from failure to thrive. It is not enough for these children to have their stomachs filled with food. Food may keep our bodies alive, but it does not meet our deeper needs for affection, human contact, compassion and finding a purpose in life.

Jesus explains in today's scripture that the Hebrew people ate the manna that God provided for them as they travelled in the desert for 40 years, but they died. But he, Jesus, is the living bread that came down from heaven. **Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.** Jesus goes beyond meeting our needs for belonging, security, community and purpose – he provides eternal life.

I pray that each of you will, in faith, believe that Jesus is truly the living bread come down from heaven and that you will feast on that bread, that you will be nourished and thrive by knowing Jesus as God come to earth, by knowing Jesus as the divine. There's no need to strive to reach God, for God has come to you in the person of Jesus Christ. Believe and be nourished unto eternal life.