



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Tenth Sunday after Trinity

4 August 2024

readings: [2 Samuel 11.26-12.13a](#), [Ephesians 4.1-16](#), [John 6.24-35](#)

John 6:24-35

Context first. The story so far...

Jesus has fed the 5000, then sent the disciples across the lake while he goes up to pray alone on the mountain. He then crosses the sea on foot to the astonishment of the disciples. Then the people, who saw he hadn't gotten into the boat with the disciples, and now can't find him anywhere, catch a lift with some boats which were passing from Tiberias and go to Capernaum looking for him. When they finally catch up to him, they ask respectfully, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" (6:25)

Let's stop here. First let's look at this from the followers' perspective.

On all accounts they have shown themselves faithful students by keeping track of their rabbi's movements and investing time to find him. They are naturally curious about who he is and how he actually got across the sea, and since they have invested time and money, they probably feel they deserve an answer. They are doing all the right things... but even though they are following someone they think might be a possible prophet, or a messenger from God, they aren't really aware of their unmet spiritual needs. So, they are doing the right things but only partially for the right reasons.

Let me expand on that. The obvious answer from Jesus to this crowd, who are already invested in him and are curious enough to travel distances to follow him, and in fact want to make him king, would have been something like:

"I walked on water!" or "See, I am the Chosen one!"

That would have clinched the deal, and got him lots of new followers, surely?!

But he doesn't do that. He rebukes them. Because seen from Jesus' perspective, he knows that their main reason for following him is that he has provided for their physical needs (healed the sick and fed the 5000), which is great, but he also sees their spiritual hunger and knows he can give them so much more...

"don't work for food that perishes; but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (John 6:27).

He is trying to point out that spiritually they are starving, and he is the answer to that too...

One question for you.

Could it be that we, like the crowd, are spiritually starving too, and don't even know it?

One way to answer that, could be, to ask yourself the following 2 questions:

What percentage of your time, money, skills and talents are you spending on working for worldly food?

What about your spiritual life?

How do you reconcile your answer – whatever that was – with this line of scripture (John 6:27)? “don’t work for food that perishes; but for the food that endures for eternal life...”

This isn’t meant to send you on a guilt trip. I don’t believe that Jesus meant that we shouldn’t concern ourselves with our physical needs – he gave us plenty of examples of sharing food and drink and fun with friends

and strangers, so if it was good enough for Jesus, chances are it is good enough for us!

But what he is pointing out is that those speaking to him have lost any balance when it comes to working for their spiritual life... and there for the grace of God go we!

Let’s be honest, the body is insatiable! It needs more and more all the time... It is fair to say that most of the time, our lives are so consumed by our responsibilities, our work, our earthly needs and the needs of our loved ones, we leave little time to develop our spiritual life.

But maybe you are the exception, after all you are all here, in church! Working on your spiritual life... perhaps.

Isn’t it the truth though, that often, we come to church on Sunday hoping to be fed (and on a good Sunday we are!), but then leave ourselves to starve spiritually the rest of the week? Why is that? Have we learned this spiritual helplessness from church? It scares me that maybe we have. It’s a lie, you know?

We – YOU - are not spiritually helpless!

Church is important, we build strength and courage from being, worshipping and praying together. But that does not mean we don’t have to patiently and lovingly work on our relationship with God.

Openness, balance, silence, being humble enough to admit that we need God, in our life, in our joy, in our sadness, in our very being. At the very essence of our being we are so often restless, dissatisfied, lonely, hungry! We ignore that hunger at our peril. Working on our spiritual life means turning to God. He will satisfy us. Listen to the words of Jesus again:

“[work...] for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27).

“the food that endures for eternal life [...] the Son of Man will give you!”

Encounters with God are freely given and happen through grace. Sometimes in a moment, sometimes as part of a life’s work, sometimes both. What Jesus is saying is that all God wants from us is that we turn to him. Make room for God and he will always find you. Truly I tell you, he will cross the universe for you. Make time to receive him.

So, here comes a practical suggestion. Why not take between 15 and 30 minute every day to stop and just be in God’s loving presence? You can do this through meditation or prayer, indoors or

outdoors, with Scripture or in nature, in savouring a biscuit or through fasting. It doesn't really matter. What matters is to stop and to be open to receiving the Bread of Life, for it is only through him that our spiritual hunger and thirst can be satisfied and that we can begin to experience "life to the full".

This week, let the Lord your God LOVE you.

Amen

**The Revd Carla Vicêncio Prior
Canon for Community Learning**