

July 29 – Pentecost +10

2 Samuel 11:1-15

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Samuel+11:1-15>

Ephesians 3:14-21

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+3:14-21>

John 6:1-21

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+6:1-21>

Video with Bishop Michael Curry

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=5185>

I've had a harder time than usual writing sermons this month. Many of the passages – like Jesus' rejection in Nazareth, and John the Baptist's beheading – have been really challenging on their own, and even harder to connect with one or two of the other readings. In July we've also looked at some readings in the Old Testament that aren't that all that common or familiar. I remember a couple of weeks ago someone saying, "Who's Amos?"

Today's Old Testament reading isn't about a prophet, but King David, and the lengths he goes to get what he wants, and to cover up what he does. When I saw this as one of the two possible readings for the lectionary I thought oh geez, here we go again. Why couldn't it be simpler? Oddly enough, the other option was to preach about Elisha using grains and loaves of barley to feed a crowd of 100 people. That seemed like a cop out so here we are, David and Bathsheba, and the two stories that weren't included in last week's gospel, the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on water.

Instead of diving into the texts the way we usually do, I want us to take a look at a video by Bishop Michael Curry – it's just 2 minutes.

How is it that God is trying to feed the world not on fast food, but gourmet food that gives life? How is it that God is trying to feed us with words that give life?

At the end of last month, and the beginning of this month, there was a period of 2 weeks when my wife Maren was gone for all but a couple of days in between. Maren does most of the cooking in our home because to be quite frank it's just better. I can cook if I have to, and I enjoy doing it occasionally but not daily. So I meal planned and cooked while she was away, trying to make extras for leftovers and so on. There might have been a frozen meal or two that I just had to throw in the over, but sometimes the only thing that stopped me from grabbing a burger and fries was the drive to Oromocto and the time and gas it would take. But making meals, healthy meals, takes time...it takes effort, and energy...and sometimes means standing over a stove when you're already hot from the summer sun. Even though it takes less time to go into a drive-thru or whatever it might be, we know that fast food isn't good for us. It might feed us, but it's not really giving us the nutrition we need to live a healthy life.

How do we answer those questions, How is it that God is trying to feed the world not on fast food, but gourmet food that gives life? How is it that God is trying to feed us with words that give life?

Two weeks ago, when we looked at Herod giving into the request for John's head, we also considered the honour/shame dynamic, and the pressure between giving into societal pressure and maintaining personal conviction. And I said that we still live as members of a society that values certain things and not others, but we have to keep in mind the big picture and who's in charge. Many times we might see our involvement in God's ministry aligning with cultural values like helping those in need, and supporting charitable causes, but we have to keep in mind those other times when our discipleship requires going against the current and having the courage to do so.

Two of the big things that stand out in our first story is that David breaks two commandments – he commits adultery, and he kills. But there's much more than that. When David inquired about Bathsheba and found out that she was married he should have stopped there. Instead he sends messengers to take her to him, he rapes her¹, and the rest is history.

I can give you a processed sermon, some fast food, telling you to follow the commandments and stay away from sin. I can make a quick message out of the loaves and fish that say even if you only have a little and give it to God, wonderful things can happen. That Jesus who can walk on water can do amazing things in your life. It's true, but it's not gourmet – that's not nutritious theology.

If we want to get the marrow of the text it's going to take a little bit more work...think of lobster rather than chicken...getting the meat is going to be harder and messier. And going back to Michael Curry's video, if we look beyond the individual passages, and take the texts as a whole, sometimes we can see some common themes. And when I meditate on our July readings I think about two words: call, and compassion.

The call of the prophets to speak God's words to the people. What's interesting is that these each one of the prophets we've read about, Ezekiel, Amos, and Jeremiah, are chosen by God at a particular time in history to call the people back into a right relationship with God. Amos is just a regular guy, tending to trees and animals, when God calls him to speak. Jeremiah was young when he begins his ministry, even resisting God's call by complaining that he was only a child and didn't know how to speak. Ezekiel was not as young, but he too is commissioned by God who tells Ezekiel to speak the words God gives to him, whether or not the people hear. We read about the call of the disciples to begin their ministries. And we have to remember the call God places on our lives to be faithful witnesses. This isn't just a matter of following rules, but embodying love, grace, and compassion in the things we do each day. Because each day we have the choice to partner with God in ministry and demonstrate simple yet profound acts of kindness and love, or we can choose to go another way, and do whatever we feel like regardless of whether or not it points to God.

Sometimes it's really obvious to know the difference – as we see with David and Bathsheba, or Herod and John the Baptist. But other times it's harder to see...what's wrong with prioritizing rest over having compassion for others? Or what about common phrases, like these ones on the screen? (2 phrases were included on the powerpoint reading: *"Life is better when you do what makes you happy regardless of what others think. It's your life, not theirs"* ; *"do what makes you happy, be with who makes you smile"*)

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2535 Wil Gafney Commentary on 2 Samuel

They seem fine. What's wrong with trying to find happiness? I don't mean to offend anyone, especially if you have this on a wall somewhere in your home or anything, but I consider these fast food. This is me-first, unhealthy, self-centered thinking. It's how David lived in that moment. He did what made him happy, regardless of the consequences, regardless of what others think.

But we're not living for us, we're living – or supposed to be living – for God. Look at the difference it makes if we make those statements God-centered.

(2 phrases were included on the powerpoint reading: “Life is better when you do what makes ~~you~~ God happy regardless of what others think. It's your life, not theirs” ; “do what makes ~~you~~ God happy, be with who makes ~~you~~ God smile”)

Life is better, not necessarily easier or more fun, but it's better when we do what makes God happy regardless of how that's perceived. When Herod chose to give into the request for John's head he gave into the crowd, to his own social image, because of how he might have been perceived if he didn't keep his word.

When the disciples return to Jesus and are looking forward to some quiet time together, do you think they really wanted to be around big crowds? What if they did what made themselves happy, rather than putting the needs of others ahead of their own? Just look at the difference in approach and implication when we put the focus on making God happy rather than ourselves. I'm not saying that we can't look for happiness or enjoy our family and friends, but to reconsider what it means to be part of God's mission and ministry in the world, and put God ahead of ourselves – to live as Jesus feeding the people, rather than David feeding his own appetite.

How is it that God is trying to feed the world not on fast food, but gourmet food that gives life? How is it that God is trying to feed us with words that give life?

Hopefully the more and more we see and understand Jesus' love and compassion for everyone, the more and more we see and understand that our ministry is not just for ourselves...that our actions each day are like pieces of fabric that make a quilt. And I want to leave you with an invitation while Maren and I visit our families. Next week is the BBQ at the Pines for Cambridge and Waterborough, and in two weeks is a joint-service with the United Church and a picnic for Gagetown. I invite you to invite someone to one of those events.

We haven't talked about BELLS for a while, and Surprise the World, but after this service you'll be sent back into your communities. These events are meant to bless others in various ways, and you'll be eating together. We're learning right now about Christ – the compassion Jesus demonstrated, the response to what is the greatest commandment - to love God and to love our neighbour. Maybe tomorrow morning consider it an opportunity to listen to the Spirit and think about who you should invite.

Who is someone in need of community? Who needs compassion? Who is looking to be fed in a way that gives life?

We are called to bear witness, and be compassionate, in ways that make God's ministry of wholeness and love real to others, in a way that feeds them with gourmet food. If we are

willing, we can be channels of God's love and healing in our lives and in the lives of our neighbours.

I will echo the words Paul writes to the community in Ephesus, but hear them as my own for us today as we think about the many opportunities we have to reach out in love to those around us, including the BBQ and picnic. I pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may comprehend the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.