

Pastor Roy's Sermon from August 16, 2015

Every three years, the Gospel of John presents us the opportunity to think a good 4 weeks in a row about Jesus as the Bread of Life. So here we go. What does bread mean to us? Bread sustains and nourishes. It satisfies our hunger. Of course, now we are learning that the carbohydrates in bread make us hungrier faster. . .but that detail aside, I think Jesus is going for the gut level response that bread is good. It satisfies.

So we might ask the question, what truly and deeply satisfies? What does it even mean to be satisfied? Is it a matter of the body, the mind, or the soul? And there are different levels of satisfaction. There is the instant gratification of a burger, fries, and a coke—topped off with a milk shake. But I often find that 45 minutes later my satisfaction is replaced by a sense of discomfort. I find a smoothie with a balance of ingredients might not taste anywhere nearly as good, but 45 minutes later—especially since I'm less likely to overeat it, I feel quite good... The challenge is to value and act for the greater satisfaction.

Jesus is the Bread of life by his example. What else could he have accomplished during his lifetime? Marriage? Family? Respectable rabbi? He could have done many things differently to increase his satisfaction in the moment. But he hung around a rag-tag band of disciples and some other friends and acquaintances that often drew accusations rather than complements—women, tax collectors, brief encounters with Gentiles, not to mention lepers and the poor people. Why did he do it? How did he make his decisions? Was he living his life not based on what might make him feel good in the moment, but based on wisdom? Following an inner voice which led him along wisdom's path?

Life is complicated. What is wisdom? According to Proverbs wisdom observes and chooses with simplicity. Jesus treated people with equality, not giving preference to some based on what was in it for him. That is why he reached out to the chronically ill and disabled, and the poor. There was nothing in it for him but headaches. Yet he knew that is with whom he belonged. Today theologians call it the "preferential option for the poor." That God not only observes all people with the same lens, with the same love, but God delights in helping the poor, in revealing Godself to the poor. Further God calls us to go beyond fair, beyond judgment of whether the poor are worthy to sharing with them of the abundance of God which gives us life, hope, and joy. !We could be a rock—always acted upon, but we are blessed with the ability to choose, to do, to be aware that we are. When we help the poor and mentally ill to rise up from their poverty and illness, everyone benefits. We create joy and hope where it was absent before. As the writer of James reminds, when we seek the approval of the wealthy, they can cause us trouble of all sorts. But when we embrace those who cannot help themselves, we become free. Further, crime is reduced. Violence declines. Prison populations drop. [But instead I find that politicians and voters support a robust prison program which removes anyone perceived as an offender from the street and if there are collateral losses with families and innocent people serving time, so be it. It's not "my problem."]

Jesus welcomed all people, but he worked hard to avoid our natural avoidance of those who demand much of us. Jesus was courageous. Jesus practiced wisdom. Jesus and wisdom call us to walk with those who are otherwise alone. No one is saying this is easy. And we don't have to solve all the problems, but sometimes we have opportunities to help in surprisingly significant ways. Wisdom smiles when we accept the challenge and live wisely, sharing prayerfully in mercy.

The writer of Ephesians encourages us to "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time."

The bread of life is to live the life of simplicity as did Jesus. Let us eat and drink of wisdom's table....