

Promises You Can Trust

John 6:24-35

We have a glorious celebration ahead of us this morning as we prepare to baptize several young children and bring them into the sacred Body of Christ. Not only is this our duty, but it is also in keeping with what Jesus says in Mark's gospel: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such that the Kingdom of God belongs."

As you go through today's worship, I'd encourage you to take a long look at the stained-glass window depicting St. Anne offering her sage wisdom to the young Mary, and consider your own roles as parents, guardians, trusted counselors to the children you've known and to those you will know.

We'll be making a solemn promise during today's baptism ceremony. Father Tim will ask: "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ." And I pray our response will not be tepid and timid, but bold and assertive as we say: "We will!"

Now, for a little gospel.

Today's passage continues our exploration of the sixth chapter of John. Jesus has just fed 5,000 people, and many have tracked him down. They want him to do a great miracle to prove he is the Messiah. Turning five small loaves and two fish into a banquet is all well and good, but it's not like what happened in the way-backs when manna fell from heaven everyday for 40 years as the Hebrew children traveled through the wilderness, on their way to Canaan land.

You can imagine those in the crowd nudging each other, nodding their heads in agreement and saying: Now that was a miracle. That was a sign we could believe in. But you, Jesus, what work are you doing? What miracle can you show us?

Here Jesus challenges them not to build their faith on miracles, but on him.

"I am the bread of life," he says, the bread that came down from heaven, the bread that gives life. "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." At another point in the gospel Jesus has a similar encounter with Mary and Martha before raising their brother, Lazarus. There, he says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?" That last question could be added to today's passage: I am the bread and the life. Do you believe this? Is it true for you?

John's gospel has been leading us up to this point. Right from the beginning in the prologue we read: "What came into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all." To the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus said: "Those who drink of the water I will give them will never be thirsty." And to a curious crowd he said: "Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life."

These are big, bold promises, requiring the work of faith on our part. But, I am told that Jesus makes good on his promises. Am I right? Jesus makes good on his promises. And the promise here is the spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment that comes with eternal life, with being joined to God right now.

He is not talking about our physical hunger and thirst. That's the point those he encounters in the gospel – from Nicodemus to the Samaritan woman – often miss. He's coming at things from a spiritual level and they come at the issue from a physical level. Today, he is talking about the life that is more abundant, more enriching to our souls than the common, every day affairs. But, he is using basic, simple imagery: Bread and water. Who here doesn't like bread hot from the oven, or a drink of cool water on a humid, steamy day. If any of you have ever been to Fells Point in Baltimore when the H & S Bakery's ovens are going and the whole neighborhood smells heavenly, then you have a little sense of what Jesus is talking about here. He wants us to have that same desire we have from freshly cooked bread, that same yearning.

Come to me, he says. Believe in me. Trust in me. Feed on me.

I don't know about you, but it took me awhile before I could trust in God and Jesus Christ. In my early conversations with God, I'd say that I was a very sophisticated, complicated person. I was a journalist, full of sarcasm, cynicism and suspicion. I wasn't easy. I wasn't simple, say, like a single-engine Cessna airplane. No, I was more like an SR-71 "Blackbird," or maybe an F-18 "Hornet." Very sophisticated. Very complicated.

Over time I did learn to trust and to take to heart the words of Psalm 146, where the psalmist tells us not to put our ultimate trust in rulers, or any child of earth, but to put our trust in the Lord who keeps his promises forever.

Sometimes it seems broken promises are part of life. A promised pension disappears in a company's bankruptcy. A deal falls through. A phone call never comes. Such is the life we live.

But it is not the eternal life we have through faith in Jesus Christ. And so, when we come to communion, let us feed on him who is the bread of heaven. Let us drink deeply from his cup of salvation. And let us know that we can trust this promise he makes to us and to the children we will baptize: Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never, ever be thirsty.

Amen.

Delivered on Aug. 5, 2018, by the Rev. M. Dion Thompson

