

Homily at St. Paul's on
August 2, 2009: Pent. 9,
Proper 13 – Year B
Canon Jack Lindquist

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE, says Jesus. WHOEVER COMES TO ME
WILL NEVER BE HUNGRY AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME WILL
NEVER BE THIRSTY. AMEN.

My friends: If you and I got extremely inspired here this morning, and then went home and read the entire Gospel of John from beginning to end (which would take about an hour), what would we learn about it from that over-view? Well, along with many other things, we would learn that John's Gospel is a long series of Jesus' extremely startling claims about himself, about who he is and what he's doing in the world. They are called the "I AM" statements, and they keep coming like this:

In John chapter 8, verse 12, Jesus says: "I AM the light of the world"..... In John 8, verse 58: "Before Abraham was, I AM"..... In John 10:7, "I AM the gate for the sheep"..... In John 10:11, "I AM the Good Shepherd"..... In John 11:25, "I AM the resurrection and the life"..... In John 14:10, "I AM in the Father and the Father is in me"..... In John 15:5, "I AM the vine and you are the branches"..... in John 20:17, "I AM ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"..... and that's not all of them!

And depending on the highly dramatic situation and the audience for each statement, the reaction of those First Century people to them is exactly what it would be from people today: Some in the crowd think he's crazy or some kind of con-man, including his own brothers (according to John 7:5: "Not even his brothers believed in him," it says!)..... The Jewish religious

authorities (simply called “the Jews” in John’s Gospel, but never forget that Jesus was every bit as Jewish as they were!), the religious authorities, of course, think he’s a heretic and a blasphemer or, worse, demon-possessed.... Many of Jesus’ own disciples simply can’t take anymore of this talk and so they go “Messiah-shopping” for someone who’s not so extreme, something that “works for them,” as we say..... But then those who actually decide to take Jesus up on all of his “I AM” statements (and just think about that!), those who allow him to be for them all that he is claiming to be in himself, and they are all kinds of people ---- (whether the Pharisee Nicodemus who has to sneak around and see Jesus secretly by night; or the adulteress who is about to be stoned to death by other Pharisees; or Mary and Martha of Bethany, sobbing over the death of their brother (and Jesus’ dear friend) Lazarus (and Jesus sobs with them!); or the man born blind who receives his sight; or those pagan Greeks who are fascinated with this radical rabbi and want to meet him; or Peter who has denied him; or Thomas who has doubted him; or all of those who have forsaken him; or the ever-faithful Mary Magdalene whom he makes his first female apostle) ---- yes, when all of these people allow Jesus to be for them all that he is claiming to be in himself, then THEY find him to be spring, a FANTASTIC SPRING of new joy, hope, power, forgiveness and resurrection in their lives! Indeed, they find Jesus to be exactly what John’s Gospel says he is right at its beginning, in John chapter 1, verse 14: namely, God’s Word “made flesh,” God’s LOGOS or Self-expression come as a real, historical human being – the divine within the human – God among us as one of us. That’s what all this “I AM” language means!

And, my friends, nowhere (NOWHERE!) in St. John do we find an “I AM” statement given such enormous attention as the one in today’s Gospel

from John 6, Jesus “Bread Of Life” claim and crowd scene. Indeed, it takes the whole of John 6 (all 71 verses of it , the longest chapter in the book) just to deal with it; were going to be hearing it in the Sunday Gospel readings for five weeks in a row (it already started last Sunday with Jesus’ Feeding of the Five Thousand in the wilderness); and we’re going to be digging into it in our 9:00 AM Sunday morning forums in the Guild Room each week, starting today (and we’ll provide outlines for the class)..... ALL OF THIS to probe what Jesus means when he says in John 6, beginning at verse 35: “I AM the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”..... (And from next week) “I AM the Living Bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread I will give for the life of the world is my flesh..... my FLESH” (and then follows John’s very strong language of Holy Communion)! No wonder we will need a month to explore all of this, my friends, and how wonderful that we will have the time!

As I discussed this series with our Dean a few weeks ago, I told him that I taught John’s Gospel at the University of San Diego for ten years way back in the 1970’s and 80’s, but that to this day it still haunts me and confronts me with new questions about my own personal faith. JOHN NEVER GROWS “OLD!” Indeed, as I was preparing this homily and thinking about Holy Communion that will now follow it, I stopped typing for a while and I went out on to the little balcony at our condo, overlooking downtown and the harbor, and I thought through some more “John questions” for myself..... and now I invite you to join me in thinking through those same questions for yourself as we close.

FOR, FIRST OF ALL, WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR PEOPLE. FOR ANYONE, TO HAVE A “BREAD OF LIFE?” Do I really have a “bread of

life” today, not just a title on my business card but something I am living by and living for, a meaning and purpose that keeps me living joyfully on even in the constant presence of death (as we all are)?

AND IF MY “BREAD OF LIFE” IS NOT REALLY AND TRULY JESUS, THEN WHAT IS IT AND HOW DID I COME BY THAT? If I am putting him down, what am I putting up? Look at all the people in downtown San Diego, as I did from my balcony. What are many of them “consuming” in our culture today in order to “really live” and “be alive,” as they say? With all our talk of “consumerism” and “mass consumption” in business, we forget what the word “consumer” really means! According to Webster’s Dictionary, “to consume” or to be a “consumer” is to (QUOTE) “eat or drink, especially in large quantities,” precisely the “oral” imagery that Jesus uses in today’s Gospel, and so what are people really feeding on today, “in large quantities?” Will I find it in San Diego Magazine, where the Bread of Life appears to be wealth and success, or maybe in The Reader, where the Bread of Life appears to be personal liberation? This is nothing against those two publications; I read them all the time; but it’s like they come from two different worlds: LA JOLLA and THE GASLAMP! What is “real living” for people today, and what is it for me?

AND, FINALLY, IF JESUS IS NOT ONLY OUR “BREAD OF LIFE” BUT ALSO BREAD FOR A JOURNEY – the way ancient Israel, in today’s First Lesson, ate that mysterious “manna” bread in the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land – THEN WHAT JOURNEY ARE WE JESUS-FOLLOWERS SUPPOSED TO BE ON? What is our exodus, our “exit” and “escape route” (because that’s what the Greek word exodus means, an “exit” and “escape route”)? What slavery do we want to leave behind us and where do we want to go? Are we simply walking from birth to

death, and from the womb to the tomb, with no real purpose or point to it all? OR..... OR WILL WE HEAR THE VOICE OF THE CRUCIFIED AND RISEN ONE WHO STANDS IN OUR MIDST TODAY AND SAYS: "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE! FEED ON ME AND SEE! BE FREE IN ME! AND HAVE NEW LIFE NOW AND FOREVER."

Yes, he offers himself to us here at his table every Sunday: "THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE BREAD OF HEAVEN.....EAT!"....."THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, THE CUP OF SALVATION..... DRINK!" And so, my friends, starting today, I invite you to join me in making this August a month of consuming and devouring, and of eating and drinking, GOD in Jesus Christ as we have never done before. This is St. John's idea of faith!

BON APPETITE!