
THE RIGHT WAY TO GET FED UP

Tonight's Gospel is just the first part of a long discourse by JESUS.

- Throughout that long teaching, JESUS refers to HIMSELF as the Bread of Life.
 - This is one of seven "I am" statements of JESUS in the Gospel of John:
 1. Bread of Life
 2. Light of the World
 3. Good Shepherd
 4. Gate for the Sheep
 5. Vine
 6. Way, Truth, and Life
 7. Resurrection and Life

This teaching is set up by the passage of the feeding of the 5,000.

- The crowd comes and JESUS feeds them—a miracle right before their eyes.
- But then the disciples leave by boat and JESUS slips away, followed by HIM walking to the disciples on the water.
 - When the crowd discover that HE and the disciples are gone, they take off by boat, hoping to find them and looking in the area of Capernaum, on the other side of the lake.
- Upon locating JESUS, they ask what seems like a logical question, "When did YOU get here?"
 - But what is it that they are really asking?
 - "Why did you come here when we were all over there?"
 - "JESUS, why did you leave us?"
 - And perhaps there is one larger question behind their spoken one: "We came all this way to find YOU. What's in it for us?"

JESUS knows this.

- In fact, HE names it: "You are looking for ME, not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."

Yesterday, they got a free meal and a show to go along with it (a banquet from two sardines and five dinner rolls), but it's not enough.

- They want more.
 - More food for our bellies. More miracles to entertain us.
 - What's in it for us?

How many today come to CHRIST asking the same thing?

- "What's in it for us?"

One place where I think we can see this very thing is in the preaching of Joel Osteen

- Osteen pastors the largest church in America: a church that seats over 43,000 and more than 1.2 million viewers on television and internet.
- However, I've watched him a few times and during a one-hour program, he mentioned GOD three times and JESUS...well never.
- Osteen's message is basically this: *GOD loves you and wants to save you from a life of mediocrity and small dreams. Therefore, if you believe in GOD and are obedient to HIM, GOD will give you a plan for your life that includes big dreams, self-esteem, favor, health and wealth, influence, a better job, a positive self-image, and a fulfilled life free of negativity.*
 - That's a great message, isn't it,
 - but it is not the one that JESUS proclaimed in the Bible.

I think the size of Osteen's following is a reflection of his preaching: it is something in which many people want to believe.

- If you believe in GOD, GOD will give you everything you want.

Some years ago, a Korean Church asked to rent space from the church I was serving.

- I asked the pastor why they wanted to start a new church when there was another Korean language church just two blocks down the street.
- He told me that many Koreans go to church not to worship, but for the opportunity to do business afterward.
- He wanted to lead a church that didn't ask, "What's in it for me?" but rather, "What do you require of me, LORD?"

There are many who come asking, "What can the church do for me?"

- But the Kingdom of GOD needs people who come saying, "LORD, what can I do for YOUR church?"

That's hard to do when the needs of this life seem so great.

- It's hard to do when this world seems to demand so much.

The crowd in today's Gospel asked, "What must we do to do the works GOD requires?"

- I think they're still just asking, "What do we have to do to get what we want from YOU?"

"What must we do to do the works GOD requires?" is a good question, though.

- But if you ask it, be prepared.
- You always should be careful what you ask for.

I like to encourage people to be very specific in what they pray for.

There is a story about a man who had a badly deformed hand.

- One day he prayed, "O GOD, please make my hand like the other one."
- Suddenly, BOOM, he got exactly what he asked for.
- If only he had been more specific as to which hand he wanted changed.

When the rich young man came to JESUS and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life," JESUS' answer was certainly not what he was hoping for.

- "Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor."

JESUS wasn't saying that wealth was wrong or bad.

- But for this young man, wealth was getting in the way of his relationship with GOD.
- In fact, it had become his god, so JESUS said get rid of it.

When the crowd asks JESUS, "What must we do to do the works GOD requires?" they probably wanted and answer like, "Go to worship each week," or, "Give your offerings."

- They wanted to hear that they were doing the right things already and then to be rewarded with more food.

JESUS, though, replies, "The work of GOD is this: to believe in the ONE HE has sent." Just believe!

- "Believe that I am the Bread of Life—the Bread that comes down from heaven and gives life."
- And at this point the crowd balks.
- Think about what HE'S offering them, and all they have to do is believe in HIM?

And this really is what is so hard about the Gospel and the sacraments.

- They make these incredible promises about life and wholeness and seem to say, "Just believe, and your life will be wonderful."
- Sounds like an "Osteenism."

Think about it: at Baptism, we pour water over an infant's head and announce to her GOD'S promise to be with her forever, to go with her wherever she may go, and to hold on to her through all that life has to offer—including even death—and to grant her eternal life.

- That's some promise!

And exactly the same thing happens in the LORD'S Supper.

- Because each time you come to the Table you are promised nothing less than forgiveness, acceptance, wholeness:

- in a word, life, both now and forever.

Doesn't that sound like the great diet? Wouldn't those things fill you?

Some years ago, a friend of mine while serving as a hospital chaplain had a conversation with a psychiatrist.

- The doctor said to my friend, "The goal of all counseling is for a person to love him- or herself. For if you aren't going to love yourself, who will, and if you don't start now, then when?"

- My friend asked, "But doctor, have you yet encountered a single person who has had the ability to love himself without first experiencing love from another person? Have you known even one person like that?"

- After a moment of silence, the doctor quietly said, "No. No, not really."

This, you see, is the sacraments.

- Communion and baptism are GOD'S external and objective words of love and forgiveness, given in a form we can receive:

- physical, visible words for GOD'S physical, visible people.

I like to put it this way:

- In baptism, GOD'S loving arms are placed around us with the words, "You are mine!"

- In communion, GOD'S loving arms are opened to us with the words, "I am yours!"

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So, though the crowd demands a miracle, "Give us a sign so that we can believe."

- And this is the same crowd that JESUS fed the day before with a child's lunch, so JESUS turns it back on them.

- "Don't work for the food that spoils."

- After all, that manna during the Exodus wanderings only lasted a day, so that they had to go get more the next day, and the next day, and the day after.

- "And by the way," JESUS says, "Moses didn't give your ancestors that food. It came from GOD."

GOD rarely does what we want done in the way we want it done.

- Our GOD is a GOD of surprises, of upheavals, of reversals.

- So, rather than do what is GOD is supposed to do,

- or what we, the crowd, demand GOD to do,

- GOD does the unexpected:

- instead of pronouncing judgement in the face of our sin and selfishness, GOD offers mercy.

- Instead of just punishment, GOD offers love.

- Instead of condemnation, GOD offers forgiveness.

- Instead of coming in power, GOD came in weakness.

- And instead of giving us the miracle of just another lunch, GOD gives us GOD'S own self.

- For as Martin Luther would remind us, the whole of JESUS' life, death, and resurrection are summed up both concisely and eloquently in the two words we hear when we come to the Table: "for you."
 - "This is the body of CHRIST, given for you."
 - "This is the blood of CHRIST, shed for you."

The hardest thing of all for us to accept about the sacraments is this:

- that they contain GOD'S unexpected, surprising, and unforeseen gift of GOD'S own self.

And if you believe this, you will never be hungry.

If you focus on what GOD wants—faith in JESUS—you will be filled.

If you seek a deeper relationship with CHRIST, I guarantee you that you will be fed up.

- But isn't that the right way to get fed up.