

## **Pentecost 12B – Lectionary 19 08/11/2024**

The crowds are following Jesus, but Jesus is throwing them for a loop again. Jesus is saying he is the bread of life that has come down from heaven. This can't be as he is the son of Joseph, and they know his father and mother. Now he is claiming to be God? The Judeans say that they know the truth.

They seem to be so closed minded. This idea that this Jesus who they knew as a child and knew his family could not be God. This was contrary to scripture. It was blowing their mind. They had been following him to eat physical and spiritual food, but this was too much.

Jesus doesn't argue with them, he tells them that God drew them to him. I would think that really confounded them. When their ancestors ate manna in the wilderness they died. God had sent the manna day by day to meet their needs, and still they complained. Now Jesus is saying that he himself is the bread from heaven and connecting with him will give them eternal life.

Jesus says that he will give his life for the world and his flesh is the work he did on the cross. For John feasting on the bread of life is about being in relationship with Jesus. This looks different for everyone. The closer that we get in any relationship means that there will be changes, it means that we will be called to pivot in grace. The only thing that stays the same with Jesus is Jesus' love for us.

Without the willingness to pivot in grace, relationships do not grow and may end. Jesus will not give up on us, but there are times that we may give up on Jesus. To be church today means pivoting in grace. Churches that are not willing to pivot in grace will likely die.

I would like us to think about what pivoting in grace means. It means not doing things the way that they have been done before. That can be a hard pill to swallow, but it is the truth. The church as we knew it even a few years ago is not the same because our world is not the same.

When we hear ourselves saying, we've always done it that way, it is time to examine that way. If the world has changed and people have changed, the approach to many things needs to change. Hiring a new staff person may not grow a program. It takes looking at different approaches and being willing to pivot in grace and look at different options.

What things looked like in the past will never look that way again. That is a hard truth. It is much easier to try and recreate what we used to have, but since the world has changed, that does not work. People are at different places, thus the approach must be different.

Jesus was pivoting in grace all of the time. His message stayed the same, but people were always presenting him with different ideas, challenging him with their fears and anxieties. As I have said, Jesus did not argue with the crowd, the Judeans. He was challenging them to change their way of thinking, their way of viewing and identifying him.

In our individual lives, there are many times that we are called to pivot in grace. Some of them are not easy and some we would rather not have to, but in order to move forward they are necessary. Yesterday, I heard dripping in the basement. Of course I was getting ready to go to our ecumenical pride service. I didn't fully know what was wrong, but I called Bob and asked him, who do I call.

The plumbers were able to get to my place later in the afternoon. Unfortunately, after trying to unplug the pipes, it did not work. They are coming back Monday to put in a cleanout in to run the unclogger out to the street and back in the house from outside.

No useable plumbing, thus I cannot stay at my house until they fix it. Thus, I had to find a place to stay. I just happened to have enough Wyndam points to stay 2 nights at the Ramada Inn with a free breakfast. I was still able to go to the Pride event.

I'm not able to go to Saugatuck as planned after church, but that is okay. It is not always easy, but I believe God works things out for us. Thankfully, we believe as Christians, we are not left alone to do these pivots in grace. We are promised that God will never leave us nor forsake us.

God does amazing things, and we are called to trust and believe. This is where feasting on the bread of life, Jesus, comes in. Often, the difficulty in pivoting in grace comes from our unwillingness to do it. It can be scary, and it often brings out fears and anxieties. Jesus, the bread of life, comes to us and says, open yourself up to me and I will give you what you need when you need it.

For me this is what it means to not be hungry and thirsty. To look at what and who I have and realize that they are all gifts from God and be thankful. This is what helps me to make pivot in grace. If I try and make pivots by myself or not at all, it will be more of a struggle. This is where I am challenged to trust God in Jesus Christ, to have faith that God knows what God is doing.

This is not easy as it means letting go of old ways of thinking and of doing things. Those things that brought security, we are often challenged to let go of in order for a pivot in grace to happen. This is what John says, faith is believing and trusting in Jesus and what is required to be in relationship with Jesus. This is what the Judeans struggled with and so do we.

As we move forward here at Faith, be prepared to pivot in grace, to look at things in a broader spectrum. I do not believe that Jesus says keep doing things the way that you have been. We are called to look at what we have learned about who we are and who are neighbors are. How can we connect with them directly is the challenge?

This does not mean that we wait until the next pastor comes. Jesus the bread of life calls us to do this work now. We have developed 3 goals:

1. Increase participation in Youth and Education programs.
2. Restructure system (time, money and resources) to support the goals for ministry.
3. Continue to develop strategies to connect with our community to better understand and celebrate our diversity and inclusion in the community.

These goals have come from our times together this past year. We are strengthened through the bread of life to carry out these goals. Throughout the fall the council will be figuring out how to carry out these goals.

I believe Faith Lutheran Church has what is needed, from what God has already blessed us with. The question becomes are we ready to do new and exciting things? We will be called to pivot in grace, to find new ways of doing things. This is when we are called to trust and believe in God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus the bread of life first of all strengthens us to do the work we are called to do, but then we become bearers of the bread of life as we carry out this ministry. This is when we also carry out Paul's challenge:

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Come feast on Jesus the bread of life, be strengthened to pivot in grace and carry out the goals set before us. May we be imitators of God's love and share the bread of life with others.

Let us pray: Gracious God, you give us all that we need and more to do the ministry that you have called us to do. May your Holy Spirit help us further define how to carry out the goals that you set before us. AS we feed on Jesus the bread of life, give us the strength and wisdom to pivot in grace as share your love, share Jesus, the bread of life. Amen