

Love

This week marks the sixth year that we have served a hot meal to the hungry on Saturday mornings.

A ministry the Lino family started and which so many of you have jumped in on over the years to keep it going.

Before COVID, folks from all over the island came by to pitch in!

From Charlie Kokubun's gang of retired union members to the Mormons to lawyers and Priory girls and Rotarians, not to mention a gaggle of good ole St. E's folks!

But when COVID hit, we wondered if we could keep it going.

And sure enough, a core crew came together saying, resoundingly: "YES!"

So Lynette and Joy and the two Charlie's and Kerry and Jinna and Lovely and Cathy, Camille and Jeremy (and many others) make it happen, week in and week out.

At first, we changed it from a sit down meal to take-out only.

But as we understood more about COVID, and as more folks got vaccinated, it changed again from take-out to outdoor dining.

And through it all, what had been a ragtag crew of strangers, ranging from ex-cons to drug addicts to the mentally infirm, to a grandma escaping noisy grandkids, is slowly becoming a community of friends, as the Holy Spirit works her magic in the most unlikely of places.

Bread for the belly.

Bread for the soul.

How do we fill both bodies and souls?

Isn't that the eternal human struggle?

It's a struggle that puts us in line with the folks approaching Jesus today, as they ask the question that lingers through the centuries:

"Who are you Jesus?"

Of all the gospel writers, it's John who seems to wrestle the most with the sheer mystery that is Jesus.

In the other gospels, Jesus TELLS parables.

Those seemingly everyday stories that, when you least expect it, sock you in the eye.

But in John's gospel, Jesus IS the parable.

Over and over, Jesus tells us who he is.

And over and over, we just can't seem to wrap our heads around it.

I am the bread of life.

I am the living water.

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

It's John's Gospel that introduces us to Nicodemus.

That rich, politically connected, PhD member of the inner circle.

Nicodemus, who tiptoes out of his house one night to track down Jesus.

Because he's intrigued.

Because he's curious.

And because he's baffled!

His encounter with Jesus doesn't clear the air.

It leaves Nicodemus scratching his head even harder!

Because he has no clue what Jesus means when he speaks of being born again.

Or of the Spirit that moves like the wind.

And here's the thing!

The writer of John's Gospel doesn't stop there.

No, John keeps challenging us to go deep with Jesus.

To reject who **we say** the Messiah must be.

Power and glory, of course!

To embrace the odd Messiah sent by God.

What's all this about "surrender and love?!"

That's why John tells us the story of the woman at the well.

You remember her!

A woman married five times.

Meaning, she's either been widowed a lot or was dismissed by a series of husbands.

In any case, she's a bad luck omen to the neighbors, which is why she's alone at the well with Jesus.

As she listens to him talk about living water — that satisfies thirst forever.

She struggles to understand.

Is he offering indoor plumbing?

Or is he offering something so profoundly beautiful that she just can't imagine it.

Who are you Jesus?

Which brings us to today, when those who ate their fill just last night on the mountaintop, are upset that Jesus ditched them.

As they listen in confused wonder to Jesus calling himself "bread."

Inviting those with ears to hear — to consume him.

So that we might become him.

As more heads are scratched.

Who are you Jesus?

The question goes all the way back to the beginning; when God leads the Jewish people out of slavery and into a desert.

As everyones stands around scratching their heads asking:

"Really?"

"What kind of God plops people down in the middle of the desert?"
they ask.

You ask.

I ask.

And while with the benefit of hindsight it's easy for me to chide the newly freed slaves for their grumbling and mistrust, I don't need to look far in my own life, or perhaps you in yours, when I've been plopped down in the middle of some desert.

Like the desert of having a loving spouse taken by cancer.

Or the desert of false accusations at work, or unexpected illness.

Or caring for an aging and difficult parent.

Or job loss.

Or love lost.

Or child lost.

Pretty sure I'm even quicker than our Jewish mothers and fathers to belly up to the complaints window; demanding that God get his act together.

Which gets us back to Jesus.

This mysterious living water.

The one who invites us to be born anew through the Spirit.

This bread that fills us up forever.

Who are you Jesus?

Rather than searching the dictionary or the theology books for an answer, maybe a story can help shed some light on our question:

Who are you Jesus?

It's the story about a daughter who goes home to take care of her mom, who recently had a stroke.

When the caregiving starts, she's thinking of all the ways she's helping her mom.

That maybe these efforts are making up for the long ago fights from her teenage years.

The too few visits as her young family was growing.

But it doesn't take long for the caregiving to take its toll.

And tempers begin to flare.

As fights over nothing start consuming the days.

In the middle of one of those fights, (over the proper way to cook a hard boiled egg!), her mom suddenly falls quiet and says:

“Why are you doing all of this for me anyway?”

The question silences the daughter for a moment.

And then, the daughter says,

“It sort of hit me, and I start to list all of the reasons.

They just come out.

I’m afraid for her.

I want to get her well.

I feel maybe I ignored her when I was younger.

I need to show her that I am strong.

I need her to be self-sufficient again.

Until she interrupts me.”

“Junk,” Mom replies.

“Junk?!” the daughter yells, furious at the response.

Mom says again, this time a little more quietly, “Yes, junk.”

"And that 'little more quietly' tone got me."

Mom continues,

"You don't have to have all those reasons.

We love each other.

That's enough." Dass and Gorman, How Can I Help?, 191-2, paraphrased.

Perhaps love is enough.

As the writer says,

"Love people even in their sin, for that is the sure sign of divine love.

It is the highest form of love on earth.

Love all of God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it.

Love every leaf.

Every ray of God's light.

Love the animals.

Love the plants.

Love everything.

If you love everything, you'll see the divine mystery in all things.

And once you see that mystery, you'll begin to know it better every day.

And you will love the whole world – with a love that embraces all.”
F. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, paraphrased.

Which, I suppose, is what Jesus means when he says: “That the work of God is to believe in him whom he has sent.”

“Belief” not as a mere intellectual assent or loyalty oath or emotional feeling, but belief as in actually ... bungee jumping with Jesus!

By handing over our lives to self-giving love.

By washing each others feet.

By looking for the best - even in the worst among us.

By trusting that, at the end of the day, all shall be well.

Who are you Jesus?

Perhaps the answer is simply this:

I am love.

And love is enough.

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