

Love Is Enough

This week marks the third year we have served a hot meal to the houseless on Saturday mornings, a ministry the Lino family got up and running and which so many of you have jumped in on to keep it going.

And driving in last week, I got to thinking about whether or not this ministry should continue.

Ministries shouldn't be a life sentence for their volunteers and three years is a long time to do this one thing.

So my thinking was do we shut it down or reduce the times we do it?

Do we take a break and start again sometime down the road?

These were the questions I had for a bunch of our volunteers last Saturday...

Until I walked in that morning and saw enough donated Hawaiian food to feed 200 people several times over...

Until, as a few of us were at the stove heating this wonderful feast, there was suddenly ukulele music, joined by the sweet voice of Auntie Lani, then followed by a whole chorus of the houseless, most of whom are native Hawaiian, as they sang the songs of this land.

And right there, on a cool Saturday morning in Palama, the banquet feast of the Kingdom of God suddenly appeared...

It occurred to me that the people who first came to our breakfast came to fill their stomachs.

Now, many of them come to fill their souls.

What had been a rag tag crew of strangers, ranging from ex-cons to drug addicts to the mentally infirm to the just down and out, is slowly becoming a community of friends, as the Holy Spirit works her magic in the most unlikely of places, while gently chastising your rector for even thinking of closing it down...

Bread for the belly, bread for the soul, that is the eternal human struggle, and it 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 is John who seems to wrestle the most with the mystery that is Jesus.

In the other three gospels, Jesus **tells** parables, those seemingly everyday stories that, when you're not looking, sock you in the eye.

But in John's gospel, Jesus himself IS the parable:

I am the bread of life.

I am the living water.

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

And so it is John who tells us of Nicodemus, the rich, politically connected, well-educated member of the inner circle, who, sneaking out on his wife one night, tracks down Jesus; because yes, Nicodemus is intrigued; Nicodemus is curious; and Nicodemus is also confused.

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, of a Spirit that moves like the wind.

John doesn't stop there, no, John keeps challenging us to go deep with Jesus, to let go of who we say the Messiah must be (think power and glory) and to look again at the Messiah sent by God (think surrender and love).

It'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 a widow many times over or was put out by a series of husbands – in any case, a woman the neighbors likely see as a bad omen.

She listens to Jesus talking about living water and never being thirsty again...as she struggles to understand whether he's offering her indoor plumbing or something immensely and profoundly beautiful, that is just beyond her grasp.

Who are you Jesus?

Which brings us to today, when those who ate their fill, just last night, on the mountaintop, get huffy that Jesus ditched them, then listen in confused wonder as Jesus calls himself bread; inviting those with ears to hear – to consume him -- to take him in -- to make who he is into whom they might become.

And 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 into a desert and everyone scratches their heads and asks:

“Okay, now what?”

“What kind of God plops people 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 at yours, when I’ve been plopped down in the middle of the desert.

The desert of having a loving spouse taken by cancer.

The desert of unjust accusations at work.

The desert of unexpected illness or caring for an aging and difficult parent or job loss or love lost or child lost.

No, I’m sure I am even quicker than our Jewish fathers and mothers 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 into the Spirit; the bread that fills forever.

Who are you Jesus?

The woman went home to take care of her mom who had a stroke.

When she began this caregiving, she thought of all the ways she’d be helping her mom, maybe make up for the long ago fights from the teen years, the too few visits as a young family was growing.

But it didn’t take long for the caregiving to take its toll, and for tempers to flare and fights over nothing consuming the days.

In the middle of a fight that began over a hard boiled egg, the mom stops short and says:

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

Which silences the daughter for a moment, and then, she says,

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

They just came out.

I was afraid for her.

I wanted to get her well.

I felt maybe I ignored her when I was younger.

I needed to show her I was strong.

I needed her to be self-sufficient again.

On and on I went.”

“Junk,” Mom replies, when the daughter finishes.

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

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

“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.

Maybe 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.

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 Kazimirov, paraphrased.

Which, I suppose, is what Jesus has in mind when he tells us:

"That the work of God is to believe in him whom he has sent."

"Belief" meaning not an intellectual assent nor a loyalty oath nor emotional outburst, but taking the plunge with Jesus, who is the embodiment of self-giving love.

Perhaps when we reach the end of our head scratching about Jesus, when our internal debates about our mission and ministries quiet down for awhile, perhaps then we too might find our answer to that vexing question,

Who are you Jesus?

Perhaps the answer is simply this:

Love is enough.

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