

Body of Christ: You are a Sign

August 2, 2009

Scriptures: Ephesians 4:1-6, John 6:24-35 (Ord18B)

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John 6:24-35

²⁴So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. ²⁵When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

²⁸Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"

²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?" ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³²Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." ³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Ephesians 4:1-16

¹I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷But each of us

was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." ⁹(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Proclamation of the Word

Have you ever watched children play? If children do something that tickles their fancy, they want to do it over and over again. My brother used to lie on the floor, hold my hands, and balance my mid-section on his feet. When all was in balance, he would let go, and "poof" I was flying. "Do it again" I would say over and over. And we would play "Airplane" until he (not I) was exhausted.

Today we find Jesus teaching after he has shown the great crowds many signs of his Kingdom. He has healed many. He has taken a little boy's lunch, blessed it, served, and fed the 5000. Now the crowd is back for more.

Do it again, Jesus! That was great! More, more!!

Jesus sees through them. He comments, "You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of loaves." (John 6: 26)

Okay, Jesus, you figured us out. Sometimes we come back to you because you have fed our hunger. After all we are human, and we like to eat.

Sometimes we come here to church because our friends come here.

Sometimes we go on a mission trip because we want to see a new country, a new place.

Sometimes we go to a Youth Conference because, let's be honest, there are really cute guys and girls there.

Okay, Jesus you figured us out. Sometimes, we confess, we are not even looking for you at all. We come looking for what we want.

Jesus knew they were coming back for more bread and more signs that day, but he was there to tell them that they were missing the point. Jesus is the sign. Jesus is “the bread of life.”

I imagine if Jesus were writing us a pastoral letter today in the spirit of Ephesians he would write something like this:

August 2, 2009

Dear Members of the Body of Christ at Fort Hill Presbyterian Church:

Whether you realize it or not, my child, I called you here through the power of the Holy Spirit. I have a purpose for you. I want you to grow up into mature Christians. I called you together to be my church- a living, breathing reflection of me- the Body of Christ. Whether you came looking for me or not, I have found you.

But I did not call you each one by one, although my call is personal. I called you together. I am calling you to be a sign to a broken, fearful, and hungry world.

I have called you to be my BODY here on earth,
a body knit together in my love,
a body where every ligament works together to be a sign to the
world of my purposes and love.

Your unity shows the world who I am.

I know that is asking a lot. You are capable because God, the Father created you. And as my disciple Eugene Peterson in his Bible Paraphrase, *The Message*, writes, God calls you to “walk-better yet to run! On the road that God called you to travel...make that you do so with humility and discipline- not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences. You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both inwardly and outwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all.”

(Peterson, *The Message*, Ephesians 4, paraphrase)

I have come because I am the Bread of Life. I feed the hungry, yes, but people are hungry for more. I bring meaning and purpose to life. I am the link between you and the Creator. I came to show the world the way.

You as Fort Hill Presbyterian Church have already committed yourselves to being the Body of Christ. In your Vision Statement you claim that calling. I saw it written above the doors to your sanctuary,

Joining together on a journey of Christian faith, we seek to be Disciples of Christ and to share God's love in our community and around the world.

You show the world a sign of God's grace through your life together as you preach, teach, and care for one another. And you are a sign when you go out in your daily lives to serve, to share my Good News, and live out your faith in your work, schools, and homes. I am so glad that you seek not only to serve and love one another, but that you also seek to share my love with this community and the whole world.

I am inviting you today to a feast. I am giving you myself in the sharing of the bread and wine at my table. I offer you this meal whether you are 9 or 90. You are my child. I give myself to you so that you might be sustained in your faith. But this gift of me is not just to fill you up, it is so that you might go and fill the hungers of this world.

Where people are hurting or lonely, share love with them.

Where people are hopeless or feeling helpless, share my good news.

Where people are plagued by anger and violence, share my peace.

Where my creation and world are broken, share my grace.

Where people have no bread, share your bread with them.

You know my disciple Paul did so much to share my message with the world. In the letter he wrote to the church at Ephesus about the calling and purpose of my church, he said it so well. The Holy Spirit gives you the gifts for ministry, "To equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity to the full measure of Christ...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:12-16)

So today, I invite you to share in the meal that is a visible sign and seal of my good news. By taking part in my body and blood, you too will be a visible sign as you live out your life of faith. So feed on me. I am the bread that will fill your hungers

and you will never thirst. This meal is here so that you can grow into the Body of Christ that I intend for you to be. Take your lead from me. I am the source of everything you do. I keep you in step with each other. My very breath and blood flow in you, nourishing you so that you will grow up healthy in God, robust in my love. (paraphrase of Eugene Peterson's The Message , Ephesians 4:15-16)

So eat up. For I am offering you myself...taken, blest, broken, and shared so that you and all my children may eat and be filled.

Grace and Peace,
Jesus

CHARGE (16th Century, Teresa of Avila)

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours,

Yours are the eyes through which

Christ's compassion is to look out to the world

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about
doing good;

Yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless all people now.