

July 19, 2015 - 8 Pentecost – B

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Ephesians 2:11-22

Mark 6:30-42

The text is from the gospel and this, from 2 Ephesians: “So Jesus claimed and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”

So this is not a really pastor-like thing to admit, but once a year in August, I try to get up to the horse-races. I mean, I can tell you that I go because it’s a lovely spot—and it is. And I could tell you that the horses are beautiful and the races are exciting—and they are. I could tell you it’s great for people-watching. And it is that.

But I’ll tell you something else, too: unlike a lot of the rest of life, there’s no uncertainty at the race track. Trust me, when you win at the track, *you* win. And when you lose at the track, *you* lose. You’re wagering your own investments: a safe \$2. Lutheran-kind-of-bet on the handicapper’s best pick or a whimsical \$5. boxed exacta on the two horses *you* think might stand a chance--based on how you’ve been able to decipher the racing form--or a crazy \$10. wager on a long-shot because the horse’s name reminded you of your grandson or of a not-quite-forgotten, long-ago love.

You pick. You invest. You lose. There is no smoke and mirrors when you bet at the races. In fact, there are photo finishes in the event of any doubt.

But it doesn’t work that way here. Not *here*. Here, there’s not a lot of certainty about things. We don’t all agree on what the Bible means. We don’t always like the hymns we sing or the way the liturgy is going. And in terms of donating our time and talents to the work of the church, we don’t always get a “return on our investments” quite the way you do when you bring your winning ticket to the cashier’s window. Or these days, machine.

And indeed, we also live with a kind of unsettling uncertainty: We don’t know what our future *will* look like and we don’t always agree on what our future *should* look like. Even today, when we gather with the people of First and the UUA church for a conversation about our shared future together, we will come away with no certain answers, though we pray we will leave that discussion with hope in our hearts and glimmerings of things to come.

The truth is that those many of you in this sanctuary today who give of your time and your talents do so out of your great love of God and faith in the body of Christ, which is the church. And in that way, you are different—holier, I’d go so far as to say—than the disciples we encounter in today’s gospel story.

In our story today we get a great example of the difference between *following* Jesus and *imitating* the disciples. Imitating the disciples, it turns out, is not always such a good thing:

Send the people away, is what the disciples said. We have nothing here to give them, is what the disciples said. It's deserted out here, is what the disciples said, by which they also meant, these people are not our responsibility; they're not worth our time.

Send them away, they said. What are they trying to get off of us? All we have to give them are words—*your* words, Jesus. And words are cheap, Jesus. So send the crowd away. Because it was one thing when *you* were feeding them with nice words about God's love, etc. etc. etc. But when you said to us that "*we* should give them something to eat," then we didn't like it. Because then it was about more than just your words; it was also about *our* actions. And we have nothing for them here.

So send them away. They have given us nothing. They deserve nothing.

That's the disciples speaking the language we know best: you do for me, I'll do for you. God bless the child that's got his own.

But look—the heart of the matter is this: if we are here on Sunday morning, it is very likely that we know in our very being that, spiritually speaking, we do *not* have our own. We did not come here looking to make a return on our spiritual or emotional investments.

We did not come—and we do not come, I suspect—because we think we are better or more deserving people than others who might show up. We did not come because we thought we could "get what we wanted" as though church were a mail order catalog and baptism was a Visa card that had no spending limit and no expiration date.

No, if we are here in any kind of an honest way on this Sunday morning, or on any Sunday morning, it's because we have come with empty hands and hungry hearts and growling stomachs. We come not because we have wagered anything—not because we have brought anything with us at all, except some sin and some heartache. We come to church because we know that here, *here* is where God will feed us.

We arrive here and Christ says to us: **Sit down!**

Christ says, Don't go away.

Sit down. Better yet, if you can, *kneel* down.

Better yet, stretch out your hands. Let the bread and the one who gives the bread touch them. Let the wine and the one who gives the wine touch you. Here Christ says "take this bread; it is for you. Take this wine; it is yours."

Christ encourages us: Don't be too fussy. Don't think yourself to be too perfect. Because honestly, that would be a *real* joke.

Don't judge the one whose shoulders your own shoulders rub against.

Don't say mean things. Don't think mean things. Don't think. For a moment, Christ asks us to begin to realize how hungry we really are. For what we didn't

even know how to talk about, our hunger for love that is met in the word and the sacrament of our God. In that sacrament we are loved. And when you are loved, how can you not feel tugged to love back, to *give* back? Love will always calm the insecure calculator that is our brain. Love silences the inner critic, even if only for a little time.

Love will feed us in such a way that we are equipped to go out and feed other people, seek to meet others' needs, speak out on behalf of those who suffer the violence and injustice of this world. Love will feed us in such a way that we may not even fear the future as much because we are assured that God will walk with us right into it.

What we learn from this gospel story today is that the disciples wanted to send the crowd away because they thought the crowd wanted more than they could, or should give. And Jesus showed them that they had no clue about what "more" was really all about.

In the deserted place, when Jesus was done speaking and the disciples were cranky and the shops were closed—that's just the spot where the crowd found more. More than enough.

And that is why we gather here, week after week. Because in the word of God and in God's sacraments, we find more than enough. And more than enough is what we seek. More is than enough is what we doubt we can have. If we were disciples we would send our own selves way away, doubting there was anything here to give.

But Jesus re-calls us to remind us we are loved, that we will be fed. And nourished.

And so we come to the table. And so we reach out. We receive; we taste. We are re-membered in a meal that feeds us more deeply than our hungers know to long for.

And as we depart this table? Have we had enough? Enough God for the moment? Enough of that which makes us want no more?

I guess not.

For that is why we all are here. We are here because the disciples got it all wrong. They said "we have nothing here." And God says you are here because here you will always want—and here you will always find and in finding, will always want and find still more of God's love, given for you.

Amen.