

A Better Reason?

John 6:24-35

It's hard getting young people into church these days.

But, when I was a teenager I was in church every Sunday! And, my parents didn't have to bribe me or threaten me. No, I didn't want to miss a Sunday. I was up, raring to go. In this very church. It's changed a bit since that time of course. I hope I don't trigger anyone if I mention the pews . . . those uncomfortable wooden pews that you used to slip out of when you sat in them. And, I used to be able to count the bricks if the sermon went on too long! Still, I *wanted* to be here . . . in church. Why? Well, it wasn't because I was particularly pious, or devote . . . I was just a normal, average teenager . . . who loved going to church . . . you see, there were these two girls . . .

. . . I thought they were pretty good looking . . . the trouble was, *they* didn't come every Sunday . . . so I had to come every Sunday . . . just in case they were there!

That's a good reason to come to church, isn't it? Well, it's not a bad reason, but I reckon there are better reasons.

But, what about you . . . why do you come to church on a Sunday? Do you come because you're rostered on for something? Maybe you come because you like the music? Or, the worship style? Maybe you come to catch up with friends? Maybe you're here because that's just what you do on a Sunday morning? Maybe you've come to reflect and contemplate. Perhaps you're here today to see if the new bloke is as bad as you feared he'd be . . . maybe worse! Maybe you've even come to meet Jesus! They are all good reasons to come to church, but I still think there are better reasons.

The crowd that went to Capernaum looking for Jesus had good reason to want to find him . . . good reason to want to see him: somehow he'd just turned a couple loaves and fish into a feast for thousands . . . with left-overs!! Wouldn't you want more of that? Like having your own personal vending machine! And, with the cost of living what it is today, who doesn't want a free feed? So, the crowd flocks to Jesus . . . their motive may not be the best but at least they are there. Jesus sees that. Jesus knows that. He knows what's going on for them . . . in them. Their reason for being there is not bad . . . it's quite reasonable . . . but Jesus knows a better reason. So, he doesn't ridicule them . . . he doesn't write them off . . . he doesn't send them away. No, he just tells them how it is: "You want to fill your stomachs . . . which is important . . . and necessary . . . but I have something more to give you . . . I have food that will make you whole . . . complete. Come to me for *that*."

And, already Jesus is feeding them . . . by teaching them . . . "I am the bread of life".

"Wow!" the crowd says, "That's amazing!" And, it is amazing . . . but, they still don't get it . . . they still are stuck . . . and, as we'll hear in the weeks ahead, some walk away from Jesus . . . if he's not going to do miracles what good is he? If he's not going to give them what *they* think they need, what good is he? So, they walk away. But, Jesus isn't put off . . . not by their short-sightedness . . . *he* doesn't walk away to find a more appreciative audience . . . no, he keeps on teaching . . . keeps giving . . . keeps accepting their lack of understanding . . . he keeps giving himself. But, even that's not enough . . . and soon some of those who were amazed at his miracles are calling for his blood . . . rejecting him all together . . . nailing him to a cross!

And, what's Jesus' response . . . to this rejecting? To this nailing? He feeds them again! "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing"

"They don't know what they're doing".

Maybe that's us too? As we come to church with all our mixed motives . . . and we all have them! As our minds wander distractedly during the reading of the lessons . . . as we mentally wrestle with how on earth bread and wine can be Jesus' body and blood . . . as we think: "Will this sermon ever end?" . . . as we walk out the door and instantly forget everything that happened . . . as we go and repeat the same sins over and over again . . . that's us . . . we don't know what we're doing . . . here. We don't get it.

And, what's Jesus' response . . . to our mixed motives . . . to our less than perfect reasons . . . to our ordinary, impious thoughts . . . to our lack of understanding? What's Jesus' response? He feeds us . . . again and again! It's what we need . . . even if we don't get it! Which is why, I think, we keep coming back . . . perhaps without really knowing why. Sure, the coffee may be tasty . . . the music may be uplifting . . . the fellowship may be warm . . . and all those are good reasons to be here . . . but deep down something else is happening . . . something we don't get up here . . . something that we don't even *feel* sometimes . . . we are being fed . . . we are being made whole.

And, it starts for us from the cross . . . those words were for us too: "Father, forgive them . . ." And, God does . . . we hear that in the words of absolution: "You are right with God" . . . we receive that forgiveness in hand and in mouth at the Lord's Supper . . . so it's not just a 'head' thing . . . no, this is not an intellectual exercise . . . this is about wholeness . . . about fullness . . . this is God's acceptance of us . . . God's grace for us . . . despite our lack of understanding . . . despite our mixed motives . . . despite our forgetfulness . . . Jesus keeps feeding us . . . not turning away from anyone . . . not turning anyone away. That's the reason Jesus wants us here. That's the reason we *need* to be here . . . that God might do God's work in us . . . creating faith . . . sustaining faith . . . making us whole.

But, it doesn't stop there . . . it doesn't stop *here*. After we are fed *here* we are sent out . . . sent out there . . . into the world . . . into our daily lives . . . sent into a world that's *not* Godless . . . sent into a world that's not God-forsaken . . . it's not as if Jesus is only here . . . no, as we go into daily life Jesus is already there, ready to feed us again . . . to feed us as we do the works of God. That's what happens when God has worked in us . . . we can't help but do the works of God. And, what are those works? Well, they are anything we do when we look beyond ourselves and see the needs of others . . . and meet the needs of others . . . they are the works of God.

It's not fast food by any means . . . it can be *hard* work, but you will find that you are nourished . . . you are being fed . . . your cup may well overflow . . . that's what Jesus promises.

And, as we serve others . . . as we care for others . . . as we feed them, they might just think to themselves: "I want what they've got" . . . and they might go looking . . . looking for wholeness . . . looking for fullness . . . looking for Jesus . . . perhaps not even knowing why . . . and perhaps they'll turn up here one day . . . for whatever reason . . . and Jesus will be waiting with open arms . . . hopefully we will too.

Amen.

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