

**Sermon preached by Tom Haynes
at St. Elizabeth's, Culver
August 16, 2009
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year B (Proper 15)**

[1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14](#)
[Psalm 111](#)
[Ephesians 5:15-20](#)
[John 6:51-58](#)

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be an acceptable offering in your sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

Yesterday in the Chapel, we had the funeral for John Chadwick. John was a member of St. Thomas, and I had known him reasonably well as a neighbor and a fellow member of their parish. He was a world class great guy, and he delivered meals on wheels until just a few weeks before his death. John taught at the Academies at some point in the distant past. He arrived on campus in 1963, and he retired long before I came to campus in 2000. That covers a lot of territory, but I know there are plenty of people who remember John in the classroom. I remember something else about John, and that was that he threw a great Christmas gin fizz party every year. We attended this party the first couple of years we were in town, and we had a great time.

John was a member of my father's generation, and he was born in 1923. This was just one year after my dad. John served in the Royal Air Force, and he was a glider pilot in the Invasion of Normandy. He had never breathed a word of this around me, but my father did not talk much about his military service either, and that may have been the way that members of this generation were.

All this has made me think about the kind of legacy we will leave when we pass away. In this morning's reading from I Kings, we heard that “Then David slept with his ancestors and was buried...” A few verses later, Solomon, his son is praying and says “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you...”

You may remember that Solomon is the son of Bathsheba, and that not every moment of David's life was a perfect example of righteousness. There is a tendency to be kind in the way we remember people and look at the big picture. Given the fact that our own lives are not the perfect examples of righteousness, this is probably an encouraging tendency.

Now as you ponder legacies, here is a thing that crosses your mind. King David was a great and influential person. He was a king after all. He is supposed to have written many of the psalms, and that alone is more of an accomplishment than anything I have done recently. he killed

Goliath with a rock from a sling. He was an ancestor of Jesus. David was really an extraordinary guy in a lot of ways.

John Chadwick served two tours as a glider pilot in WWII, and Richard Battersby told me that only about one in forty of these pilots survived two tours of duty. I stand in awe. It turns out that John was an extraordinary guy as well. Somehow I seem like a fairly ordinary guy.

In the church year, we are in ordinary time, so I am going to claim this is the season for ordinary people. The term “ordinary” actually comes from the fact that we use ordinal numbers to count the Sundays. This Sunday is the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, and next Sunday will be the twelfth, but I like the idea that this time is the time for ordinary people like you and me and not just for giants of the faith.

I talked last week about the habits of the faith and the ways we become more Christ-like in the ways we live our lives. Some of these things were looking fairly ordinary too. Through our living lives in the faith, we are able to sanctify the ordinary and make it holy. We are able to be more like what God intended us to be.

I want to talk about the Gospel today, and if you have been paying attention, you will notice that I have been preaching from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Epistles for the last few weeks. The problem is that the readings from John have been the “Bread of Life” readings. We have five straight weeks of Gospel readings about bread – no kidding. I decided to mix things up a little, but today it is time to mention bread, and I mention it because it is so very ordinary.

Bread is a basic foodstuff. You can make it fancy and all, but bread is a staple of diets all over the globe. We pray for “daily bread” in the Lord’s Prayer. When Adam and Eve got kicked out of the Garden of Eden, God tells Adam “By the seat of your face, you shall eat bread until you return to the ground.” In Exodus 16, the Israelites complain that they are stuck in the wilderness with nothing to eat. God tells Moses “I am going to rain bread from Heaven for you.” In the miraculous feeding of the 5000, Jesus multiplies loaves and fishes.

The thing with bread is that it is everywhere. Check kitchens and dinner tables all over the planet, and you will find bread. Bread is nothing special really. We take it for granted, but Jesus makes bread special. He blesses this bread, and he gives it to the people. Jesus tells them “This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” Ordinary stuff is sanctified by Jesus, and it is made holy.

I was invited to speak in Chapel at the Webb School in Belle Buckle, TN this last March, and I preached from Isaiah 55. Among other things, I told them that they were the bread Isaiah was talking about. You and I are this bread as well. We are made holy and given purpose by God. We are sanctified by the presence of Jesus in our lives.

Now the question is how do we respond to all this. I think one very human tendency is to look at King David, or anyone on the Church calendar (or John Chadwick for that matter), and think that

we are not heroes or saints or martyrs. We think our lives don't really matter much, and we don't see much significance maybe in what we do.

If we think this, we are wrong. God has a purpose for us, and He specializes in taking the ordinary and sanctifying it. We are made holy through God's grace, and the habits of faith are the foundation we build to hold God's handiwork. This is an awesome responsibility, and it is a blessing.

So, how do we respond to this responsibility? How do we respond to this blessing?

I would like for us to think of how we treat this gift of life God has given us. Think about the "Bread of Life" in today's Gospel. Is this bread comfort food for us? Do we reel Jesus out when we are in crisis and put Him away when times are good? This is easy to do, and it is a trap as well. We are trapped by complacency.

I want us to think instead of the "Bread of Life" as "Soul Food." By that I am not talking about fried chicken, collard greens and cornbread. That would fall into the comfort food category for me. I am talking about food for our souls. I am talking about the stuff that gives us the strength to do God's will. I am talking about the food that sustains us on our life's pilgrimage to the Promised Land.

The thoughts I want to leave you with today are these:

We are the bread in a variety of ways. We are ordinary, and God uses us to work miracles.

Jesus has given us the Bread of Life and tells us that the one who eats this bread will live forever.

We are being made holy by Jesus, and there is a purpose in what He is doing.

And now I have two questions for you.

What is God's purpose for you? What is God's purpose for us?

You may notice that I often pray for the wisdom to discern God's will and the strength to do it. Because I am praying for wisdom, I will admit that I don't have easy answers for these questions. I am committed to a life in the faith though, and our journeys will have us walking together for a while. I thank God for each of you.

I have said these words in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen