

**Sermon preached by Tom Haynes  
at St. Elizabeth's, Culver  
August 23, 2009  
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B (Proper 16)**

[1 Kings 8: 22-30, 41-43](#)

[Psalms 84](#)

[Ephesians 6:10-20](#)

[John 6:56-69](#)

*“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.”*

I think that as a rule people tend to romanticize things. We have some idea stuck in our heads, and reality does not match the expectations. When I talk to former students who are in college, they often have what we call in education “a disconnect.” They imagine that they will walk off the stage at graduation and be picked up by a limo. They will then be offered jobs as CEO of one company after another.

You have perhaps heard the joke about the recent college graduate who is in HR somewhere and is asked what he thinks a fair starting salary would be for some entry level position. The grad replies that he was expecting an offer in the neighborhood of \$100,000 a year, but it would depend on benefits. The HR Director asks what he thinks about a benefits package with four weeks of paid vacation, full medical and dental, a fixed benefit retirement plan, a company car and a signing bonus. The graduate replies, “That sounds great, but you are just kidding me, right.” The HR Director says “Sure, but you started it.”

When I was teaching in the public schools, I had a series of student teachers. Some of them were great, but some of them had no clue really what they were getting into. You would have these conversations with them while doing cafeteria duty or grading tests in the lounge during a planning period. Somehow they were looking at teaching and thinking about the month of July in the math classroom. The reality was a tough one for them. Teaching looks like work, and in some cases they were a little disillusioned.

I preached last week on bread, and today's lesson is the last of five weeks of bread readings from the Gospel of John. Now that we are at the end of the “summer of bread,” I want to put it in perspective maybe. Here is some context for the bread. The Gospel of John has as a theme the Incarnation. The Gospel starts, “In the beginning was the Word.” At John 1:14, we are told “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” This is the essence of the Incarnation. God took human form and became flesh and blood like you and me. This is one of those mysteries of faith. We believe, but it may be hard to understand.

In today's reading, Jesus tells us that he is the Bread of Life. Jesus is present to us in another physical way in the Eucharist we will receive later in this service. This is another one of those

things which may be hard to understand, and it deals with the difference in good ideas and the stuff we can touch. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where theory meets practice. Word becomes flesh.

Now Jesus is a smart guy. He knows that there are people there who like the fact that he heals people, preaches short sermons and can feed lots of folks with just a few loaves and fish. What is not to like? The problem is that some people are spiritual but not religious. They like the idea of religion, but when it boils down to practicing the faith, they are gone. These are the people who are asking Jesus "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" This is where the spiritual and the religious part ways.

I would like you to notice the response of Jesus to the people who can't believe and act on those beliefs. This was not an "in your face" moment. It did not involve lawyers or threats or a new ad campaign to improve the image. He let them go. In effect they had not ever been with him. They just thought they were. It was time to make it official.

In one of those things I think is very touching, Jesus also asks the rest of the disciples, "Do you also wish to go away?" Peter answers, "Lord, to whom can we go?" You can imagine people leaving and the true disciples understanding that some of these followers were not really followers. Jesus had to have been sad when people turned their backs and left. He must have been sad when he asked this question, but Peter hits the nail on the head with his reply.

Peter replies that there is nowhere to go. They have found the words of eternal life. They know Jesus and follow him. Peter is a man who is spiritual and religious as well. Even when it looks like work, Peter is a disciple.

I want to go back briefly to the student teacher idea I threw out there earlier in the sermon. Some of these people had bitten off more than they could chew. They were on the teacher certification freight train, and it looked like there was not a graceful way to get off. So what happens to these folks? Some of them leave teaching, but oddly some of them do not. They are not very good teachers, but some of them draw paychecks from the state. You have met people perhaps who hate their jobs?

The reality did not match expectations for the guy in the job interview. The difference in theory and practice did not correspond very well for some of those student teachers either.

Now as disciples of Jesus, we want to be like Peter and this requires a choice on our parts. We have to choose to believe and we have to be willing to act on that belief. It is not enough to want to be a teacher. We have to be willing to work with students in the classroom too. It is not enough to be spiritual. We have to be religious as well.

Being religious involves communion, and by that I am not talking ONLY about the consecrated bread and wine we will consume in a few minutes. I am also talking about going to church and saying your prayers. These are all ways that we are in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. This living in communion has consequences for us, and sometimes those consequences look like work.

It is not just the disciples in the Gospel who are given the choice to follow Jesus or not. It is also the disciples in this room. Each of us is faced with this choice as well, and we need to understand the cost. Being a Christian means many things, but the message this morning is that it means we love our brothers and sisters. We are members of the Body of Christ and we are in communion. It is not just the people we like that we are called to love. It is our neighbors that we are supposed to love as ourselves. It is the people we find ourselves near.

The Brotherhood of St. Andrew meeting yesterday started by talking about prayer, and we finished really by talking about what it means to love our neighbors. We talked about how we want to focus on the things that make us different and not the things that make us the same. We sometimes say it is for religious reasons that we judge or exclude, but when we do it, it is not for Jesus. It is for ourselves that we judge, and as a group yesterday we looked at how it seemed as if historically it was motivated by money or power.

One of the things we decided yesterday at the Brotherhood is that we are committed to the Christian community here in Culver. It is not just our church or the Christians that we like. I want to say we had the choice yesterday in our conversation that Jesus gave the disciples. We are committed to communion and community. We want to heal and not further divide the Body of Christ. I say Amen to that.

The takeaways this morning are these:

Jesus gives us the choice to follow him or leave.

Following Jesus is a choice to be in communion and to love our neighbors.

It is not enough to believe or want to believe. We have to be willing to act on those beliefs.

We are blessed as a community by each of you who have chosen to be here this morning. I thank God for your witness here in Culver.

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