

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I carry in my heart a pocketful of passages from Holy Scripture that are most dear to me...as a Baptized Christian and as a pastor. As Baptized Christian these beloved passages speak to me, as a pastor these passages speak for me. Today we have before us one of those passages. From the prophet Jeremiah we hear:

In your forbearance do not take me away; know that on your account I suffer insult. ¹⁶
Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:15-16)

What's the old saying...you are what you eat?

Jeremiah in this first lesson today is addressing a people who are being led by and are giving into a sinful society. They have put their trust in earthly power and material things. Like us today who feed on and act upon the cultural influences that saturate who we think we are and who we really are. But today throughout our lessons, we hear words like forbearance, and instructions such as, let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor...be ardent in spirit, rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer, contribute...to needs...extend hospitality to strangers, bless those who persecute you...live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty, associate with the lowly...and finally, do not claim to be wiser than you are, rather deny yourself and follow the Lord.

Here before us is an entire gourmet smorgasbord of incentive for us, but unfortunately, we are conditioned by a culture that says, we only have time for the McDonalds-drive-thru version of it. To eat these words fully would mean to NOT ONLY HEAR the words, but to understand, to participate, and become these words. Are we truly being the rich decadent Words that we eat or are we just wanting things our way of the drive-thru, or fast-food variety of the words laid out before us today? As Baptized Christians, we know that we have been saved by the unmerited, undeserved grace of God, given freely to us through the life and death of Jesus Christ...how then shall they live?

Today, Paul gives a series of very specific modes of behavior and we then see in the Gospel what these words really mean to us and how they are truly lived out through Peter. Once again, dear Peter becomes a wonderful example of how it may appear that we "get it," but we really don't...we set our minds on divine things but we do them in a human way. Sitting here today we can look back and be critical of Peter and we may wonder why and how he just doesn't seem to "get it". But I think too when looking at Peter in a critical light, we too would claim with the utmost confidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. We too understand, like Peter, that this suffering that Jesus refers to only happens to us if we are NOT the "good Christians" we profess to be. Besides, we could never let any kind of suffering happen to Jesus and we could never deny him...even knowing that our sin is what hangs on the cross and our egos and fast-food mentality of our faith denies Jesus every time within our human behavior. In essence, we act the same way Peter does because we continue to act on our human will or our human nature and we too would take Jesus aside and rebuke him, and say to him, "God forbid it,

Lord! This must never happen to you." And we would do so thinking we are doing the proper Christian thing for our dear friend.

Once again, we do so because we act according to our drive-thru cultural influence. We digest this influence because we are comfortable with it, we like it, it fills us, and it puts us in control. Within our cultural influence, interpretation, and understanding we may see the death of Jesus as a meaningless violent accident of history but then when we really look and discern what is happening, we might see that our actions and our fast-food mentality simply make Jesus a hapless victim instead of an essential most divine and willing partner of God's strategy of grace and salvation for us all.

There is a dynamic about these lessons today that I pray will open our hearts and our minds to see a bit deeper or perhaps gain a broader and more open perspective of our faith as well as our understanding of it. In other words, I pray that these lessons would move us from a pedestrian fast-food understanding to an engaging decadent involvement with the Word of God and our sense of call to share the word, or our call to discipleship.

¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart...(Jeremiah 15:16)

I fondly recall the first time that I heard a professor at seminary use these words from Jeremiah in a sermon when referring to the Eucharist. I vividly recall it because it really moved me...moved me not because it was clever but because it was so theologically sound. Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart. It was in these words that I understood the joy and the delight of the Eucharist to be much more than bread and wine.

The Holy Eucharist is our physical involvement with and our attachment to the grace upon grace we receive from God. But more importantly understanding that the very grace given comes at a very dear price...the life of the very Son of God...this grace received is the joy of my heart...knowing that God loves us this much to give His only Son to free us all from the bonds of sin and death...the very thing that Peter today in the Gospel is attempting to forbid from taking place. He is acting on his will and NOT seeing the depths of God's will for us through the grace given in Jesus Christ.

Nonetheless, we are all individuals around this Holy Meal, we participate as individuals eating and drinking the bread and wine that is set before us but as we do this, we are no longer individuals, we are one body, one assembly that is the visible body of Jesus Christ...and we do this by simply eating and drinking. And as Luther has said, we can point to the participation in the Eucharist that is taking place and say "Here is God." Flippantly, we can say that in our participation of the Holy Eucharist, that finally, we are what we eat. But keep in mind that we are in that moment because God through the Holy Spirit is acting, we are merely participating and we are NOT alone when we do so. Furthermore, not only is our participation in this grace given the very will of God in this Holy Meal, it is also our defining understanding of who we are in this assembled community centered in this Holy Meal and it is also a call to discipleship because the call to discipleship is a matter of community.

Detrick Bonhoeffer makes this point about individuals becoming community and our call to discipleship because of it...Bonhoeffer writes this:

A truth, a doctrine, or a religion needs no space of its own. Such entities are bodyless. They do not go beyond being heard, learned, and understood. But the incarnate Son of God needs not only ears or even hearts; he needs actual, living human beings who follow him. That is why he (Jesus) called his disciples into following him bodily. His community with them was something everyone could see. It was founded and held together by none other than Jesus Christ, the incarnate one himself. It was the Word made flesh who had called them, who had created the visible, bodily community. Those who had been called could no longer remain hidden; they were the light which has to shine, the city on the hill which is bound to be seen.¹

By this Holy Meal we are the called community that Jesus has formed and this community is something that can be seen. Through this Holy Meal we are given grace upon grace, we are a sinner who has been given the very grace that makes us a saint. Through the very body and blood of Jesus Christ we become part of a body that no longer eats and drinks with a cultural fast-food mentality. In this Holy Meal we have become a subversive gathering, a gathering intent on rejecting our fast-food understanding with a deeper more decadent understanding of who we are as Baptized Christians...and how could we not...the very Eucharist is consecrated by these opening words: Jesus, (the very body we become in this Eucharist) In the night in which he was betrayed...betrayed by whom?²...betrayed by a culture that has cast a veil over the understanding of who Jesus is, a culture that takes Jesus aside and rebukes him, and says to him, God forbid this, Lord! This must never happen.

Verse 51 in the Gospel of John, we are reminded of what Jesus has said to us:

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51)

Luther proclaims this:

I know not where to find God, either in heaven or on earth, except in the flesh of Christ.³

Here before us today in this proclamation of this Word and in this Holy Eucharist is the very flesh of God, it is the Good News, the promise of grace and mercy, it is Jesus Christ. And in this Word made flesh we become what we eat! The Good News of Jesus Christ is that, God’s words are found today and made known to us in this proclamation and in this Holy Eucharist...as so we eat them and they become a joy simply by the sheer grace they give to us. Through our faith in the Word that we eat our worldly characteristics no longer define us or others and we are all recognized in the one true flesh, Jesus Christ. May we all hear, taste, and see the joy and the delight of God’s heart, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord who we become through this Word and this Holy Meal.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4, Discipleship. Translated from the German Edition, Edited by Martin Kuskeř and Ilse Tödt. Minneapolis, Fortress Press paperback edition: 2003. Chapter Eleven, “The Visible Church Community” page 226.

2 Jenson, Robert W. *Story and Promise, A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973. Chapter Eleven, “The Community of the Promise, page 178.

3 Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Luther’s Works Volume 23, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 6-8*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957. Page 123.