

*Based on John 6:63 and "Ode to Bread" by Pablo Neruda*

Friends, it has been a month!

I had no idea when we began this sojourn through the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, and its discourse on Jesus as The Bread of Life, that we would land where we have landed from one week to the next.

As I shared with one of you mid-week, it seems as if the sermons this month have been *preaching me*, rather than the other way around.

To recap: our first Sunday began with a focus on *being*, seeing, noticing what is already here: the purple flowers, the bread of life, the will to live itself, which we have come to understand is the truest of miracles.

Our second Sunday continued with a focus on the flesh and its goodness, on the body as the lived experience of spirituality. Somehow in the midst of that focus, this progressive Presbyterian preacher found herself skirting dangerously close to proclaiming a scientific argument for the conservative Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation! Didn't know that was coming, did you? (Neither did I.)

Last Sunday brought us to tears - and comfort - as we placed the reality of our individual mortality in the context of eternity. We celebrated this gift of Life, with a capital L, *Zoe* in the Greek, that never really ends, even as we mourn the heartbreak of each particular individual life we love that does.

Today we are told that none of this teaching is easy, and boy do we know it. Anyone who has ever tried to pin down the words of a mystic and translate them into a practical, daily, systematic, rational, replicable way of life is going to have a hard time of it.

It turns out the mystic lives and moves on an utterly different plane of being than most of us. Even though, to outward appearances, the mystic eats and drinks and works and plays in the world like the rest of us, the mystic is wholly absorbed in that *Zoe* view from eternity.

When a mystic is trying to teach us something of that *Zoe* view from eternity, generally speaking the best we mere mortals can do is grasp in a momentary, fleeting, insight what the mystic seems to know in body and soul every moment of their lives.

The teaching of a mystic is in fact so hard to grasp that of course the Church has ruined this particular section in John's Gospel by trying to make it *make sense*. For centuries, the Church writ large has tried to turn the mystical message into a system of belief with a checklist *about* Jesus, rather than inviting us to explore the experiential mystical worldview we might *share with* Jesus.

We at SPC have been trying to correct that error this month. In our own mumbling fumbling way, through our liturgy and our reflections, and our communion, we have been trying to *immerse* ourselves in the mystical experiential worldview the Jesus of John's Gospel is trying to articulate.

We have been trying to *practice with Jesus* the Oneness of all things, in order to know beyond words what Jesus is trying to express with words. We have been trying to celebrate an intentional shift of the Sacrament from a set of rules and regulations that make sure we *get it right* into a ritualized practice of embodied spirituality that grounds us tangibly in the same experiential worldview of Jesus.

*Spirit and Life*, Jesus calls the substance of this experiential worldview in our Lesson today, whether we know this substance through Word or through Sacrament or through prayer or through song.

*Spirit* here is *pneuma* in the Greek, *ruach* in the Hebrew, *spiritus* in the Latin, *prana* in the Sanskrit, all of which also mean *breath*. Which means, as I like to say, if you are breathing, you are spiritual.

And *Life* here is *Zoe*, as we have discussed before. The *concept* of Life with capital L, with all of Life's cycles, and all of Life's decay, and all of Life's rebirth.

What Jesus, the mystic, has been trying to do all along through this teaching is bring us back to the breath which is our Spirit, in order that we might know more profoundly the union of our personal, individual lives with the universal Life of *Zoe*.

Every breath is the Spirit of *Zoe* breathing through us. Every breath, as I shared with our Deacons last Thursday, is a prayer.

Yes, the teaching may be difficult. But boy is it worth hanging in there to experience, even if we never truly figure it out.

If nothing else, the fleeting experience of mystical oneness we find in Word and Sacrament instills in us the compassion that offers meaning, hope, and belonging to all who seek it. Which, if we are paying close attention, is the first sentence of our SPC Identity Statement.

If nothing else, the fleeting experience of mystical oneness we find in Word and Sacrament instills in us the strength to feed all who hunger in body in soul.

If nothing else, the fleeting experience of mystical oneness we find in Word and Sacrament grants us courage to work for justice and wholeness in ourselves and in the world.

We become who we say we want to be by practicing the mystical oneness of Word and Sacrament, even if we find it fleeting in a brief moment of connection and communion.

Who knows? Maybe, just maybe, if only for a moment, (maybe today!) the fleeting experience of mystical oneness we find in Word and Sacrament might just become for us, as it becomes for the Jesus of John's Gospel: The Bread of Life, for the Life of the World, in the flesh, that we might live forever.

Which is to say, Spirit and Life.