

"Rabbi, Lord, when did *you* get here?" This is the first thing the crowds say to Jesus. How often do we say these words, either with our lips or our actions? How often do we say, "Lord where were you?" "Why weren't you there?" "Lord why weren't you there in that pain; in that accident; in that relationship? In all that mess?" (If we could place ourselves within this story, wouldn't this be us? Demanding more of Jesus and little to nothing of ourselves?) We become so focused on the past, with our arms crossed, expecting to finally earn some love, earn peace, earn God's Grace— that we in fact miss the Lord who is here, and now, in the present tense.

*Even now, Jesus comes to us to change our grasping with clenched fists into receiving with open hands.*

Jesus' response in this Gospel reading is, as always, so wise, startlingly perceptive, and loving— reaching right to the core of the people's hearts, refusing to rotely answer the question, he responds with an undercutting insight:

He replies, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." You see, much to our surprise, Jesus doesn't congratulate them on pursuing him, and chasing him along to find him— something we would often applaud— what appears to be chasing after Jesus, these outward, pious, devotional religious practices, like reading the Bible, praying, Worship, or loving our neighbor, or certain sentimental moments in the past we hold onto with a white-knuckled compulsion; many of these are vitally important, but they are means, not the end, who is God, and we must not make them idols. They may often be ways to God, but they are not God Himself, and sometimes may actually get in the way.

In the Gospel of John, the word sign, is often used, as it is here, to connote an event which reveals God's presence — But Jesus here reveals to the people their hearts— they don't want a sign, no— they don't want anything like that, anything too awe-inspiring, too life-shifting, too knee-buckling, too heart-softening, too or

posture-humbling— no, they apparently just want some Bread, some crackers, as it were— maybe a little goat cheese and fig jam to go with it as well.

So Jesus here doesn't politely pat them on the back— no he nudges them to the new place. You see, many times the thing that brought us somewhere, is not the thing that carries us onward to the next; the reason we moved to Coronado or married this person or followed this sports team or even joined this Church is not the only reason now, although it may have first brought us to that place.

Jesus is challenging us to come into that new place, to be made, again and again, into new people through Him. (Is this not why we worship, why we Pray, to meet and be met by God, the refining Fire, who is the burning bush, consuming us without destroying us?) We must not settle just for cheese and crackers, which endure for a fleeting moment, but for the Bread that gives full Life— Jesus— is here— offering us a new way, inviting us to slow down and to read the Signs, or even more precisely, for the Signs to read us, read our motives and our weaknesses, and usher us deeper into God's Presence which is in vulnerability, openness, and trust.

*Again, Jesus has come to change our grasping with clenched fists into receiving with open hands.*

When I was 16 years old, I went on a mission trip to inner-city Baltimore and truly encountered the Risen Jesus for the first time, or at least, I should add, the first time that I was, in some since, aware of His Presence. I was at a soup kitchen and I had a short, lovely conversation with a kind, weathered man who was experiencing homelessness and had certainly encountered much hardship— as I was leaving that lunchroom, and stepped outside, I heard a voice, that was my voice and wasn't my voice, reverberating in my head saying "His name is Solomon, go tell him that that is his name." I turned, marched up to him, and said "Your name is Solomon isn't it." And startled, and even upset, he said "Yes it is, how did you know?" I replied "I guess God told me, I do not know."

This event was a major pivot point that the Lord used to make space for a huge shift in my life; for whatever reason, at this time in my life, all I needed was to be convinced of a so-called 'supernatural event', and then my heart and life were suddenly made much more open to God, to Jesus and the Scriptures and the Church—and like the crowds approaching Jesus who were just fed with the five thousand, I was carried by that event for some time, but eventually the glimmer and the goosebumps faded; eventually the cheese and crackers don't fill us anymore. Although that miracle ushered me into a life in Christ, I am now much more intrigued with the profound mystery of compassion and Grace— but, Jesus was paving a way for me to come into that new place. Jesus goes on to tell the crowd:

*(read John 6:27-33)*

Notice the grammar here, the tenses: the crowd is completely stuck in the past tense and the future tense: as the Scripture started: "Rabbi, where *did* you come from?" and here, "What sign *will* you do?"

And Jesus fires back again, but notice its in the present tense: "it wasn't Moses who gave you Bread, but my Father who gives you the Bread." — did you catch that, Jesus is giving us a hint— the Bread the Father gives is only given, now, in the present tense, it is not something we begrudgingly expect only in the future or sentimentally ruminate on in the past— those memories and hopes lead us to the Bread that is now.

And what is this Bread? Well here's a better Question: who is this Bread? The living Christ, here and now. Jesus once again does not answer their question about what sign will you give us... He simply identifies himself as the sign... "I Am the Bread of Life."

Friends, there are millions of "Breads", of cheese and crackers, things we chase after, money, success, happiness, status, appearance, memories, even past experiences of God, and these things nourish us for a time, but there is only One Bread of Life, and He is right Now. St. Augustine famously says "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our

heart is restless until it rests in you." There are Millions of breads "back then" or one day, but only one Bread here Right Now. But how do we gain those other breads? Grabbing. Controlling. Deceiving. Addictively Returning. Holding too tightly. And how do we receive the One Bread: with open hands, and open hearts. Brothers and sisters, this is the new place where Jesus wants our whole lives, our whole bodies and whole hearts in this open-handed posture— open and vulnerable to receive God's Grace, knowing that we can't hold it or grab it, but only be open to Him and simply receive, like a child.

In this way, the "work" that Jesus demands of us is not ultimately about having correct or right ideas, but having a new heart orientation, a new posture; new eyes to see and ears to hear; put another way, it's not about believing in more things, but in believing with more of ourselves. Perhaps this is why we sometimes liken the phrase "falling in Love" with our relationship with God: we are "falling into God, or falling in love with God"— because we are totally out of control, and can only receive with open hands the One who loves us now... and loves us now... and loves us now.

The Holy Communion we are about to celebrate and receive is almost a sort of dress rehearsal, as it were, for the rest of your life, for every moment from now on: practicing receiving the Lord Jesus here and now, in the simple form of Bread and fruit of the vine, because He wants to be received everywhere: in your loved ones and neighbor; in your enemies and friends. But the crowd completely misses the Bread, the nourishment that will finally give them life— But this Bread, it's not a *what*, it's a *Who*.

In this new place, we can say, with the crowd, in their response: "Lord, give us this Bread all the Time." Think about that. The crowd is so much in awe, they want this Bread Always. That means every little moment. Lord give us the eyes to see you; to be open to receive your Bread not as an object, not a what, but a who— Jesus, our Lover, our Friend, our Lord.

*Again, Jesus has come to change our grasping with clenched fists into receiving into with open hands. Amen.*