



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Have you had enough of Jesus?” **Sermon on John 6:24-35**

Donovan A. Drake

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 1, 2021

As we head into our text this morning, it might be good to provide a little background and backstory. Jesus, in John’s Gospel, is portrayed as a new and greater Moses. For example, when Moses came down from the mountain with ten commandments, Jesus came down from heaven with a new commandment, that we “...should love one another. As I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (*John 13:34*)

And now, here’s some context for this morning’s passage. In the beginning of the sixth chapter of John, Jesus has headed up to “the mountain” with his disciples, and while there, he sees thousands of people coming his way. And, where other gospels have the disciples wondering how they are going to feed the people, in John’s Gospel, it is Jesus who asks, “Where are we going to get bread for all these people to eat?”

But John tells us Jesus knows the answer to his own question, “as Passover nears”, a Moses event, Jesus provides a sign of the bread from heaven. Taking the bread and fish from a boy, he blesses and breaks it and provides manna in the wilderness. Five thousand hungry people have a banquet, and the people were satisfied. Except, they weren’t quite satisfied. They hadn’t had enough of Jesus. They wanted more from such a miracle worker. And so John writes, “When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king,” he withdrew to the mountain by himself.

Meanwhile, the disciples got in a boat and headed for the other side. When Jesus came down from the mountain, Moses might have split the water and walked on dry ground, but Jesus decided it’s just easier to walk on the water. The disciples saw him coming towards them and were afraid, and Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid.” Jesus got into the boat, and when he did, the boat was rocketed to its destination. Just like that! The crowd that want to make him king aren’t far behind.

John 6: 24-35

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.' Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." ' Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.' Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Have you had enough of Jesus? There are people who have thrown their hands up in the air and have given up on Jesus. Some of those people may be your children, or your brothers or sisters. The Jesus they see is one that is too primitive. "How can you believe that stuff?" They've had enough. Others see how Jesus has been wrapped in a flag, or a political or social agenda. They don't like what "Jesus" is up to, and they've had enough.

There are many who aren't here this morning, because this never-ending pandemic has gotten many to say, "we have just gotten out of the habit of going to church." Have you gotten out of the habit of being the church, that is, the body of Christ? I wonder what Jesus thinks about being "a habit." I wonder if Jesus likes being one of those things you do over and over and over again. A mid-life crisis is that moment when you realize your life has become a habit. And you hunger for something else. "Is there anything else?"

Have you had enough of Jesus?

I grew up in the church. As a child, I watched in Sunday school as paper cut-outs of Jesus and his disciples falling off of felt boards. Do you remember that? For me, whatever it was they were trying to teach me, it just wasn't sticking. But, in high-school, I was invited to attend a youth group at a Methodist Church, and we had great conversations about: Who is Jesus? Who am I? What does it mean to pray?

We prayed for one another. We cared for one another, and we learned to care for people we didn't much care for. And I found it all so interesting that I couldn't get enough of this Jesus. Jesus went through a reformation for me.

I suppose every reformation that has ever taken hold in the church is when someone has said, "I've had enough of Jesus!" Only to discover a new Jesus of whom "I can't get enough of Jesus!" You are hungry for more. Always wanting more. Leaning into more. That's what being in love is like.

I remember after my dad died, my mom kept saying for years, “Why did he have to die?” As if 60-plus years of marriage and my dad’s 93-years of living weren’t enough. It wasn’t enough. Why did he have to die? My mom has had a difficult time of getting out the habit of love.

Do you understand what I’m saying? I’m saying, have you had enough of Jesus? And when I say Jesus, I mean Jesus.

The crowds in John’s Gospel can’t get enough of Jesus, but when I say “Jesus,” I don’t mean Jesus. They can’t get enough of this guy who gives them what they want. “We were hungry and just like that he gave us food. Imagine if we made him king?” Can you imagine taking almighty God, and making him king of a territory that’s about 1,350 square miles, give or take? And so, they can’t get enough of Jesus, but they don’t mean Jesus. Because they don’t know.

You can hear their lack of understanding in the questions they ask Jesus. “Master, when did you get here?” Can you imagine greeting the Lord with, “God, when did you get here?” When the answer is: “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

We’re talking Jesus and Jesus is the great “I am.” I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the true vine. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the truth, the way, and the life. He knows who he is, and we can’t make him king. He’s God. “I am who I am!” We can’t make him into anything.

Dang it!

This week I was at a Presbyterian Conference Center in New Mexico called Ghost Ranch. More people know it as the place Georgia O’Keeffe painted her landscapes, bones, and blossoms. But Presbyterians know it as a conference center. That’s how Presbyterians like to meet Jesus... at a conference. And I was hoping to meet Jesus, but he wasn’t there when Beth and I arrived. Who was there was a woman behind a folding table outside the Welcome Center, who had a face that didn’t match up to my definition of a ‘Welcome Center.’ Her face was more of a “Who the hell are you?” center, because the greeting was, “We’re not accepting guests until 3:00, so you’ll just have to wait.” After a greeting like that, I didn’t want to wait, I wanted to leave. I was looking for Jesus, and that wasn’t Jesus.

That’s what people do when they come to places looking for God and don’t feel welcome. When they come to the Body of Christ and don’t receive the Body of Christ, they leave. “If that’s Jesus, I’ve had enough.”

I didn’t leave. The beauty of that place was so captivating. It’s a stunningly scenic place in the high desert of New Mexico, a place that is nestled in towering rock walls. And sunrise! The sunrise was like fire with blazing reds, golds, silvers. Dinosaur bones and billion-year formations glowed. The sunsets would set the earth ablaze again, far off storms would provide amazing fireworks, followed by a night sky with the ribbon of the Milky Way and countless stars. When God speaks of time, the words are found in the art of creation. “In the beginning was the Word....”

I couldn't get enough of the beauty. I felt that I may have been there before. I may have been in that wilderness when I was one year old. I don't remember. My brother and sister can't remember if I was there or not, but they remember the long, hot drive from Illinois to New Mexico in a '59 Plymouth. They remembered how mom bought this contraption that you put ice into, and it was supposed to cool the car. The ice lasted about five minutes. They remembered how someone tried to steal the battery out of the car at a rest stop. They remembered getting stuck by a cactus. They couldn't remember if I was there, but they also couldn't see mom and dad leaving me in a house by myself at one year old. I don't remember.

But while there last week, I do remember the beauty. That amazing beauty, and I couldn't get enough!

Except, I kept bumping into "Ms. Welcome Center." I mean, our relationship never improved. And it seemed she kept popping up everywhere. I thought it strange that on cabin doors there were warning signs about snakes and cacti, but not one for her. She could knock the Christianity right out of me. And I was there to find Jesus. One day I even went up to Ms. Welcome and said, "I appreciate all you did in getting us into this place." Her reply - "Yeah!" Enough!

I don't know why, but I was hurt by that. I mean, I made an effort. And so I had enough of Jesus, and I proceeded to go about crucifixion. After all, I'm not just nobody. I'm the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, in Nashville. We're one of the few large congregations left. I decided to talk to the director. I even rehearsed my lines. "Look, Ms. Welcome may be a great person, I don't know. But you can't have her as the welcoming face of this institution. You're going to kill it." I had an appointment to talk to the director on Wednesday. I don't know about you, but there can be people in our lives who make us angry, and we've had enough! But then...

Tuesday evening, sunset, wow. Looking at a billion years of beauty. Looking out and thinking many years ago, my dad looked at this landscape, and knowing my dad, he would have enjoyed it as much or more than I, for my dad was an artist. And my dad had an eye for the art of God. And there it was for me - the landscape, a billion years old. There with my dad, and the Word that was in the beginning. And I couldn't get enough, enough of the habit of love, there at Ghost Ranch.

I heard the word of the Lord, "You love Ms. Welcome for who she is. She is who she is. She's part of the landscape of life. You love her for who I am. I am the way, the truth, and the life. We live in angry times. But the word on the street is life is too short. And the word on the street is that we make mistakes. The word of the street is that we hurt. The word on the street is we're scared. But the Word that comes from above says...

Life is found in letting go and falling in love with love. Why did he have to die? Because he gave his life for you, Mom. Because he gave his life for you, Dad. Because he gave his life for you Brother, Sister, Ms. Welcome. You're welcome. Let it go. And when you do, what you're left with is abundant life. You can't get enough. Enough!