

John 6:60-69
St. John's Norwood
August 27, 2006
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Jesus says, "I am the bread which came down from heaven...the one who eats this bread will live forever." For the last three Sundays...and today makes four... we have been reading this sixth chapter of John's gospel. Easy reading it isn't...there is no question we would not find it on the "Beach Reading" table at Barnes and Noble. In fact as Harrison pointed out last week in his wonderful sermon, there is something to offend everyone in this sixth chapter. And so finally today, we read that the disciples have had it. They are grumbling that Jesus' teaching is too hard. Clearly, the disciples are far more comfortable with the Jesus who produced the manna that they could eat along with the five thousand than they are with the Jesus who wants them to believe that he is "the bread of eternal life."

If we are honest, I suspect some of us might be able to empathize with the disciples. Especially when all Jesus can say to explain himself is "*The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*" Instead of offering an explanation of his teaching, Jesus becomes more mysterious. Jesus is not offering any practical "how to" advice. He is not telling the disciples to go out and teach and heal the people. No, what he is telling them will transform their lives, but the disciples don't understand that. And so, in essence, from the disciples point of view, Jesus is asking them to surrender their need to understand all that he is saying...and to trust him...to wait and listen for God. Jesus is inviting his disciples not to rest in the security of the world they know but to risk it all to enter into the radical insecurity of God's promise of a world they do not know.... And some of his disciples balk...they just can't go there and they leave him.

Are we surprised? Can any of us really raise our hands and say we are eager to be radically insecure. Most of us work hard to achieve security. It is important to us. We live in a world that would have us think that there is a nice big red Staples "easy" button to push for our every problem. The media bombards us with images offering us a pill we can take or a book we can read or a club we can join or a security system we can install that will protect us from all anxiety and fear. If we have a big enough stock portfolio and a good enough retirement plan...if our kids can just work harder at their studies and stuff more activities in an already overstuffed day...if our church can just have a big enough emergency fund, if we can just bulk up Homeland Security and vote to train more troops and add more policeman, we can be secure...right?

Well, not exactly. I suspect we wouldn't be sitting here in this church if that were true. I think we know the security the world offers is a delusion...that all the knowledge

and expertise we have acquired...all the technology we have developed... will not quiet our anxiety and fear...will not heal our pain and sadness...will not replace our losses. And perhaps even more, in the end, the security the world offers does not bring us joy or peace or hope.

Recently I heard Francis Collins, the lead scientist on the gene-nom project, on NPR talking about his new book on, *The Language of God*. When asked how a scientist for whom proof is the standard could square his belief in God where faith is the standard, he answered "I have spent my whole life passionately committed to science but science can't do anything for a broken heart or help you when you have to make a life decision or face disease or pain or death or loneliness. Only God can work there."

"I am the bread which came down from heaven...the one who eats this bread will live forever." Jesus offers the disciples... and us... a choice here. We can trust that Jesus holds the promise of God and accept that radical insecurity... or we can struggle to control and secure our world...to install another security system, to put away more money, to move to another gated community. In today's Old Testament Reading, Joshua offered the tribes of Israel the same choice ...only he put it in slightly different terms. He said if you choose to serve God than you must put away your false gods.

So what's wrong with wanting to have some security in life? Does wanting a good retirement fund mean we are worshipping false gods? And how hard is it to trust Jesus when we wait in silence longing to hear from God and look out into a world and see wars raging, children dying of hunger, violence and crime in our cities, terrorism, strife in our families and church?

Perhaps it might be a good idea if we might try to imagine what's at stake for the disciples and us if we do decide to trust Jesus. Perhaps we might consider how the promise of God might transform our lives. Our psalmist for today describes God's promise this way, *"You will show me the path of life /in your presence there is fullness of joy, /and in your right hand are pleasures evermore."*

Imagine what it might feel like to believe you are completely safe in the arms of God. Imagine what it would be like to live without fear or anxiety. Imagine what it would be like to be free to say what you mean in love and not anger. Perhaps instead of holding those stocks or that retirement fund in an iron grip, we might feel free to give some of that money away to those in need in the world. Instead of spending all our time worrying and planning, we might feel free to let life unfold...to appreciate the moment in all its fullness. Perhaps we would risk loving and caring for a world even in the face of war and poverty and violence. Perhaps we would remember that we are called not to worry about our own safety, we are called to find ways to make the world a safer place for the "little ones".

Today we will say good- by to our parishioner and friend, Argentina Matavel. For the past 11 years she has worked for an organization called World Vision which helps children who are struggling against poverty and the war all over the world. Recently she

was appointed to be UN Representative for Population in Botswana. When I asked her if she was happy, she said no and yes. She wasn't happy to be leaving St John's and all her friends and the comforts and security of her life here to move to Africa where she has no idea where she will live or what she will do. But, she said, World Vision had given her a kind of hands on micro understanding of Africa's problems. Now she wondered if God wasn't calling her out to use that experience to have that macro affect of influencing government policy. Argentina has no idea what awaits her in Botswana but she has accepted the radical insecurity of a call to serve God by caring for those who can't care for themselves.

And just as we say good- by to Argentina, we will baptize and welcome Olivia Dietrich and Pia Maxwell- Cesar into the church this morning. Their parents have chosen to trust that these two little girls will be sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever. They have no idea what awaits these children either but they have accepted the radical insecurity of God's call to bring their children into the church.

How do we learn how to trust? How do we like Simon Peter say "*We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*" It doesn't happen simply by coming to church every Sunday. You might have heard the old saying..." Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than standing in the garage makes you a car." I think that we simply need to decide to trust Jesus... to let go of our need to be secure and be willing to risk becoming radically insecure.... and the journey from there will be and is unique for each one of us. It will begin when we realize we don't need to know everything...except how to wait and listen for God....to wait and listen for God in the silence in the yawning of first light...in the stillness of the night...in the quietness of our prayer...in the noise of our meetings ...wait, wait...do not turn away like those disciples...wait and listen...God's promise is not about what won't happen...God's promise is that whatever happens, God will be with us. Jesus was sent by God to lead us on a journey that in the words of professor and poet Marilyn Chandler McEntyre " will take us beyond and behind every false hope to what we hardly knew enough to hope for...and lead us into the arms of a love that will not let us go." Amen