

“PERSPECTIVE”

Sermon Text – John 6:41-51
12th Sun. a. Pent, Proper 14, B
Sun. & Mon., August 12 & 13, 2018
Zion Lutheran Church – Beecher, IL
OT Lesson – 1 Kings 19:4-8
Epistle Lesson – Ephesians 4:30-5:2
Gospel – John 6:41-51

Dear Christian friends,

“So the Jews grumbled about [Jesus], because He said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’” (John 6:41, ESV)

Like many of us... today, Jesus got into trouble when He opened His mouth. He’s hated because of what He preached... because of what He said about Himself... and about those around Him.

Two weeks ago in the Gospel reading we saw our Lord multiply loaves & fish to feed an enormous crowd. That... *then*... was fine with His enemies.

That’s because His enemies don’t concern themselves when Jesus can be looked at as simply a “divine vending machine.” It’s sort of like His enemies said: **“Go ahead and be a Bread-King, Jesus. Thrill the crowds with Your amazing tricks... fill their bellies with mysterious food... let them follow You from town to town. Just... just... just keep Your mouth shut!”**

But, God *has* to speak! Our loving God *must* be heard! As St. Paul puts it: **“...how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?”** (Romans 10:14, ESV)

But... this is where the trouble begins for Jesus! It’s when He speaks... and when His words are heard.

As you heard two weeks ago... Jesus acted and fed the 5,000... and no one seemed to have a problem with *that*!

Then... in last week’s Gospel reading... and continuing in today’s reading... Jesus began to proclaim Himself to be *far* more than a “divine vending machine!” **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.** (John 6:35, ESV)

That... *that* right there... not at the miracle of feeding 5,000... but at these words of Jesus... is where the Jews were set off to grumble about Him! It’s because He said: **“I am the bread that came down from heaven.”** (v. 41)

But... *what* is it about Jesus that trips the trigger of so many – then & *even today*? *How* is it... that His words can so enrage people... that they not only grumble against Him... but even plot to kill Him?

The answer can be seen in an 18-step metal ladder that used to be attached to a rooftop in Saigon, South Vietnam. (By the way, that city is now known as “Ho Chi Minh City.”)

Around the year 2000... American businessman Hank Meijer... (who’s part of the Meijer Food Store chain) was in Vietnam scouting out business opportunities that had opened up since the Vietnam War had been over for some time.

As he passed by the building that 25 years previously had been the U.S. Embassy, he spotted the famous metal ladder that had served as the escape route for the last Americans still in Vietnam as well as thousands of their Vietnamese allies.

You see, in April of 1975, as Saigon was falling to the communists... there was a mad scramble of people trying to escape what they thought would be either prison (at best)... or torture & death (at worst) by the invading North Vietnamese.

The people who wished to escape went to the American Embassy... then climbed that 18 step ladder to the rooftop... where helicopters hovered... waiting to take to safety those who could get on board!

When the former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger heard of Meijer's plan to bring the ladder back to America and place it in the Gerald R. Ford Museum... he was appalled. **"It's just a terrible idea. Why would you want to remind visitors [to a museum] about this horrible chapter in American history?"**

<pause>

You see what's happened here: Two people can look at the same thing and draw totally different conclusions about it. It's called: **"Perspective."**

For Meijer, the ladder was an uplifting symbol of hope. It was a reminder of how many people escaped certain death using its steps.

But for Kissinger, it was a grim reminder of one of America's most horrible failures... a tragedy that cost almost 60,000 American lives.

And so... why did **"the Jews began to grumble about"** Jesus?

It's because they see Jesus with the same eyes... the same perspective... as did Henry Kissinger see that rooftop ladder!

<pause>

Because the Jews refused to believe that Jesus really is the long-promised Messiah... Jesus is *for them* the symbol of impending judgment, defeat, & rejection by God.

Jesus is the emblem of their stony hearts... stiffened necks... & stopped up ears. For Jesus says here: **"Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me"** (v. 45) *and...* they refused to come.

The Jews hate Jesus because His words reveal to them all of their horrible failures & shortcomings & needs. Needs... which they refuse to recognize... *and certainly* don't want filled.

"So the Jews grumbled about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'" (John 6:41, ESV)

Two people can look at the same thing & draw totally different conclusions about it.

1. Kissinger saw in the stairway... a detestable thing that should be destroyed & forgotten
2. Meijer saw in the same object... a wonderful reminder of many saved lives.

Once the Jews heard Jesus proclaim Himself to be **"the Bread of Life"** they became like Kissinger and saw Jesus as a detestable thing that *likewise* must be destroyed.

<pause>

Yet for the “Meijers” of the Christian faith, so to speak... this fellow named Jesus who multiplies fish & loaves and speaks the promise of **“everlasting life”** (v. 47)... well... He’s not detestable *at all!*

No! He’s the living icon of salvation... the full representation of all of God’s love & grace toward fallen men! He is... as *He* said: **“The bread of life...”** the source of life & strength to all who believe in Him.

He told the Jews that day: **“Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness”** (v. 49) those forty years on the way to the Promised Land. And, although they ate the food provided by God... yet *still* **“they died.”**

But here in Jesus’ body sacrificed for you... *here is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.*” (v. 50)

<pause>

Every pastor has had something like this happen to him: Someone will come to church... see one of our crucifixes... and then say: **“How can you glory in a crucifix? It’s such a horrible instrument of death!”**

“If someone used a gun to shoot a loved one, would you hang a gun on the wall as a reminder of that horrible event?”

But that’s the thing... two people can look at the same thing and draw utterly different conclusions about it.

One person can see a cross with the body of Jesus on it... as a symbol of defeat & failure. In their opinion, it’s something *not* to be glorified, but to be removed from view... and hidden from memory.

But for others, for those who **“hunger for righteousness”** (Mt.5:6)... the cross is the banquet table upon which Jesus, the Bread of Life, offers Himself for their salvation!

Jesus said: **“I am the bread that came down from heaven. I am the Bread of Life. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”** (vv. 41, 48, 51)

For us, those words are absolutely no cause for grumbling... the way that the Jews grumbled. Not at all!

We *want* this living bread. We *need* it. We’ve learned that there’s nothing else on the face of the earth... that can satisfy our craving for eternal life.

And... dear Christians... this bread is now ours! It’s Jesus’ gift to us.

He’s offered up His body... His flesh... unto death on the cross... and taken it back from the grave – all for us... indeed... for the life of the entire world.

<pause>

Kissinger lost... and Meijer won! Today that 18 step ladder is on display in Grand Rapids, Michigan at the Gerald R. Ford Museum. It serves the purpose for which it was intended – it shows the hope that was realized by those who scrambled on board the helicopters that took them to a new life in America!

And today... the devil has lost... and we win! Today... here & now... we have Jesus, the Bread of Life, with us – giving us new life... *eternal life* in His name!

And... to that... we can *only* say: **“Thanks be to God!”** [Amen.]