

Jim Gill

August 26, 2018

“Bread of Life 4: Words of Life”

I Kings 8:1-6, 10, 16, 22-30 41-43 John 6:58-71 Ephesians 6:10-20

INTRODUCTION TO Me Kings 8:1-6, 10, 16, 22-30 41-43

Last week we read about Solomon’s request for a discerning heart. This morning we read about his dedication prayer for what would be the First Temple in Jerusalem. It was designed as a place for the Lord to dwell, but also as a place for people to come and worship—not only Jews, but even those foreign to the faith of Israel. Hear the word of the Lord from I Kings 8:1-6, 10, 16, 22-30 41-43

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 6:57-71

This morning’s passage concludes Jesus’ discourse on the Bread of Life. The whole discourse has been building up to this conclusion, one which causes many of Jesus’ close followers, yes disciples, to give up and go away. Hear the gospel of our Lord from John 6:57-71.

Let’s pray,

Dear Lord, thank you for this your Word for these Words of Life. Help us to not turn away, but to cling even closer to you, to meditate on your Word and take it into ourselves so that when needed, we may, call on your Word when we face temptations and go through trials. Bless to our reading and our attending to this portion of your holy words of life.

George Bernard Shaw once said, “Statistics show that 1 out of 1 dies.”

Last week we remembered Georgia Thomas who left us at the age of 93. We prayed for the family of Cody Carter, Jack and Joyce Pennington’s nephew who was killed in an industrial accident at 28 years old. Last week we lost Aretha Franklin at 76 years old. Last night the news broke that Senator John McCain had died at the age of 81. The tributes have been and will be coming. We all want to make a difference in this world. We all want to be remembered.

It’s hard to find a political leader who doesn’t want to be remembered long after he or she is gone. They want to be remembered for their accomplishments.

This morning we read about Solomon's greatest achievement --building the Temple. The fact that it was referred to as Solomon’s Temple tells you something right there.

Solomon assembled the world's best architects to design a temple unlike any structure known. The Temple was built on the threshing floor, the place where years earlier David had built an altar to worship God. Solomon chose the location which would have the greatest significance.

It took seven years altogether to complete the Temple, to finish all of the details. Solomon delayed the dedication of the Temple for eleven months so the dedication would take place during the Festival of Booths. The Temple was dedicated during a time when the people would remember their ancestors' time in the desert living in tents.

Solomon proclaimed before God and all the people, "I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever." At that inspired moment it was as if Solomon could see into the future when he prayed, "When a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name -- for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm." The Temple was so beautiful that when persons living in distant lands would see it they would be inspired. Even foreigners could learn of God's omnipotent power. 1

Solomon built "an exalted house" but it was not a place for the Lord to "dwell forever." Buildings die. Solomon dedicated the Temple in 957 BCE. 372 years after it was dedicated, King Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed the city and its temple in the summer of 587 BCE and Israel's best and brightest were carted off into exile in Babylon.

Seventy years later, in 516 BCE, King Cyrus of Persia allowed some of the Jews to return to Jerusalem and they built a Second Temple. When it was finished though, those who knew the first Temple wept. It was nowhere near the beauty of the first Temple.

987 Years after Solomon's Temple was dedicated, Jesus was engaged in a spiritual battle with those whose job it was to guard the Second Temple and all that went on therein.

Jesus claimed he was the Bread from heaven. His disciples grumbled. What is he saying? Jesus catches them grumbling, complaining, murmuring like the Israelites in the desert and he calls them on it. "Does this offend you?" he asks. What is it that offends you? Perhaps it is the undercurrent of this entire chapter that this Jesus is even more important than the all-important Moses? Maybe it is the scandal of the gospel itself: that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. Jesus follows his question with another one that seems to say that if you are offended now, you will be utterly appalled by what is yet to come.

Are we offended by the people Jesus gathers around him? He seems to not only attract, but welcome those whom decent people avoid. Anne Lamott wrote, "You can safely assume you've created God in YOUR own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." 2

The writer of the Gospel of John explains the situation like this: "From this time, many of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer followed him." Notice that it does not say that many in the crowd turned back or many that he fed turned back. We would expect that. Like many people today, there will always be people who church hop. They will keep shopping until they find a church that gives them exactly what they want. They

become church “connoisseurs” always “tasting” never settling-never settling for or settling in.

No, we could understand it if John said that many of the thousands in the crowd turned back, but what he says is, “From this time, many of his **disciples** turned back and no longer followed him.” This means some of his dedicated followers, (the equivalent of our elders, Sunday School teachers, choir members and ushers and even fellow pastors) turned their backs on him.

It hurt to see many who been with him for much of his ministry turn their back on him. How could they leave?

Of course it was Simon Peter who answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go?” You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

That is why we are here. Where else can we go? Jesus not only has the words of life He **IS** the Word of Life, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Way the Truth AND the Life!

We are part of that circle who like Peter, have come to believe and to know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. There is no way to be casual about such knowledge. If Jesus is the Savior of the world, how can we possibly give anything but our best? If he is the Son of God, how can we not give him our all?

In the preface to her book, Amazing Grace, writer Kathleen Norris tells of an evening when she was making a presentation concerning her book. Kathleen was the presenter in our first video study this summer. At Kathleen’s her presentation a woman in the audience asked her a painful question. “I don’t mean to be offensive,” she said, “but I just don’t understand how you can get so much comfort from a religion whose language does so much harm.”

Taken aback momentarily, Kathleen struggled to respond. She understood the question all too well, for she had, herself, been distanced from faith for many years. She knew what it was to struggle with the traditional language of faith. Suddenly she realized the troublesome word in the woman’s question was the word “comfort.” The questioner had asked her how she had found “such comfort in her religion.”

Kathleen answered that she didn’t think it was comfort she was seeking or comfort she’d found. “Look,” she said, as a rush of words came to her, “As far as I’m concerned, this religion has saved my life, my husband’s life, and our marriage. So it’s not comfort that I’m talking about, but salvation.” (3)

Are we offended by Jesus' priorities? Welcome the children. Touch the lepers. The last shall be first. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. Love your enemies?

Do the teachings of Jesus offend you? Will you go away or go His way? God's ways are not our ways. There is a radically different orientation required to follow Jesus and often (if not always) we'd like the world to be about us. The teaching is hard, but following Jesus is about putting God's ways before our own.

These verses foreshadow what is yet to come. The teaching is difficult. The path to resurrection victory goes inescapably through something even more difficult than hard sayings. The path to resurrection goes through the suffering of the cross and the grief of the grave. Do you wish to go away? How can we when we have come to know Jesus as the Bread of Heaven that gives us life now and forever? We have been the lost sheep Jesus has sought and found. We have been the sinful woman and the rejected leper. We are the ones who, like Peter, both confess Jesus as Lord and deny we know him. And yet... he accepts us, forgives us, loves us. So where else can we go? Where else would we want to go? So, we're in, all in, and it's going to be wonderful and really hard, too.

We are in covenant relationship with the living God - what could be better? What could be more challenging? We have committed to stick with the God who sticks with us. The world won't always welcome that steadfast love. For many the offense is too great. For some, like Judas, it compels the opposite. For some it compels betrayal.

People come and go. Buildings come and go. Physical warfare flattens even the greatest of Temples like Solomon's. Spiritual warfare causes even some of Jesus' disciples to leave from following him. It caused one of his closest disciples, Judas, to betray him. Spiritual warfare threatens even us today.

The apostle Paul followed his description of our spiritual warfare by commanding his hearers to put on the whole armor of God that we may stand firm against evil. To be missing even one part of the armor makes us vulnerable.

The Helmet of Salvation was to protect one's mind. The Breastplate of Righteousness was to protect one's heart. The Belt of Truth was to protect one's gut. The Shoes of the Gospel was to protect one's steps. The Shield of Faith was to protect one from assault from far away. The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, our only offensive weapon, was to actually attack the enemy. (Notice, there is no protection for the backside. You're only protected if you face the enemy. Running away is not a healthy option)

Alison Frey our resident flutist is also an accomplished percussionist and an avid cyclist and a fencer. One night at choir practice she had bruises on her arm from when she parried when she should have thrust.

To protect us from our enemy we have defensive armor. But to defeat our enemy we must face our enemy and use the only offensive weapon that Jesus used when he was tempted in the desert after fasting for 40 days. Jesus faced and defeated his tempter using the same resource that is available to us—with, "it is Written" -with The words of life.

Buildings come and go. 40 years after Jesus was crucified and resurrected the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. It was not a place for the Lord to dwell forever. In its place now sits another temple-the Dome of the Rock.

Buildings come and go. The original First Presbyterian on Defee Street is a vacant lot. . The building on Market Street is now occupied by another faith community. The building on Bayway is now a vacant lot. Isaiah said the grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our Lord will stand forever. To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!

As I've written and said before, the word "church" does not refer to a building. It comes from the Greek "ecclesia" --"Ec" meaning 'out" and clessia" meaning Called. To be part of a "church" is to be "Called Out." Those of us who are "church" are called out. We've been called out of the world to gather in this building and other places to hear the Words of Life. However, we've also been called out of this building to live out the Words of Life. It is not the case that we go to church." We ARE the church wherever we go.

This Sunday we remember that not only armies tear down temples. This weekend we remember that a year ago we could not even "Church." We could not even gather in this building to worship. It was the first time in my 40 years of ordained ministry that I've ever had to cancel a worship service. I was stuck in Houston and could not get to Baytown. Some lost homes. Some lost their lives. Some have gone away not to return. Some have rebuilt. Some are still waiting to rebuild. I can't imagine what it has been like for so many.

However...We are far greater than the greatest Temple Solomon could build only to have Nebuchadnezzar destroy. We are far greater than the Second Temple that the Romans leveled. In his first letter to the "called out" ones in Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (I Corinthians 5:1)

So Aretha and John are now in their house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens as is Georgia Thomas and Joyce Pennington's nephew Cody Carter.

Each of us is a living, breathing moving Temple of the Holy Spirit, filled with the Holy Spirit and following the One to whom we must all go, -- the One who has the Words of Life! Beautiful Words, Wonderful Words, Wonderful Words of Life.

Let's pray. Merciful God, who in Jesus Christ established the household of faith, we praise you for those in whose midst we are privileged to dwell. We give thanks for relatives who surround us with love. You created us to be dependent upon others for our nurture and growth. You gave us parents and guardians to care for us, siblings and peers as companions along the way. We are thankful as well for partners who share our sorrows and our joys, and for the young and the old, who season our lives with wisdom. As Jesus chose a few in whom to confide, so we are grateful for those we can trust.

We give thanks for friends who cheer us on. In them we see your Spirit of counsel and might. They stand beside us to encourage us when we are doubtful. They go before us to mark a trail we can follow. They stand behind us to push when we are indecisive. and they hold us up when we are weighed down. For all those named and unnamed who surround us with compassion and patience we give you thanks.

We give thanks for the gift of this day, and for the days that have passed since the waters of the storm named "Harvey" came upon our shores one year ago. There have been days of hope and days of despair. There have been moments of light and moments of darkness. We are thankful for your protection and for your compassion. We give thanks that you have cared for us so that we can care for others. These days have not been easy for so many. We pray for those for whom Harvey has made life more difficult, for lives where inequalities were worsened, for lives of just "getting by" made more trying. We pray for those who, while they did not die in the days of Harvey, have died in the months after Harvey from broken bodies and broken spirits. May they rest in you. Continue to open our hearts to listen to each other, to offer hospitality to friends in need, to offer shelter to the stranger in our midst, to be good stewards of the world in which we live. Give us rest from the long work of recovery; strengthen us so we can be strong for others. Help us to remember to be joyous in times of joy; lift us when our spirits fail. More than anything give us a sure sign of your presence; let our faith renew us, our faith in you and our faith in each other.

We pray for those dealing with what has been downgraded from a Hurricane to Tropical Storm Lane in Hawaii. We pray for first responders and all who are going out to those in need. We pray for those in the path of the fire storms in the West and for those working to extinguish them.

We pray for those in need of healing, for those in need of homes, for those needing employment, for those grieving the loss of loved ones. We especially pray for the family, friends and colleagues grieving the death of Senator John McCain.

This day we also give thanks for a life well lived among us. We celebrate the day that our friend Beth Ehlig was born. We pray your blessing on the food we will share and the fellowship we will enjoy around tables this day. This we pray in Jesus' name.

- 1 The Beginning Of Wisdom, Sue Anne Steffey Morrow, CSS Publishing Company, 1993, 1-55673-614-2
2. Anne Lamott
3. Kathleen Norris (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998).
- 4 .Dynamic Preaching Sermons Third Quarter 2015, King Duncan, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., 2015, 0-000-0000-20