



Harvest Thanksgiving, Year A – October 26, 2011

John 6.24-35

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

The crowd, having followed Jesus from one side of the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum, is looking for Jesus. The last time they saw him he was feeding them on the shores and they were intent on forcibly making him a king. They were going to try to mold Jesus into their own image of a leader and Jesus, Jesus who was clear about who he was and what he was to do, would have none of that. Jesus withdrew from the crowds but here in verse 24 they found him again.

When they find him they ask him "when did you get here?", you can almost hear the accusing tone in their voices. What they do not know and what we did not hear today is that Jesus took a little side trip and walked on water. The crowd, in a need to control and know every detail of Jesus' movements, demands to know exactly what happened between one side of the lake and the other. Some might say that it was a simple request for information but one might also imply a certain tone that can mean "I don't like things happening without being informed"

Truth be told I think we all have some control issues in that we like to be in control all of the time when the crowd continues to try to manipulate Jesus by asking what sign he will give them so that they might believe, Jesus reframes the question. He doesn't answer them directly but rather he tells them that they are not seeking him because of the signs that he might give them but because they have been fed with the very bread of heaven. They have been fed and have been filled.

They have been fully satisfied by the very presence of Jesus with them - that he is the very bread of life and yet they still demand control, they still demand answers.

We gathered here today are the recipients of yet another bountiful harvest. I have it on good authority that the crops this year were good. We have food in our fridges and full plates on our tables and we might be tempted to give ourselves a good pat on the back. We, after all, can monitor weather systems, respond immediately to blight and pests to ensure a good yield at the end of the season. Our gadgets and satellites and storm tracker sevens allow us to plant and harvest more than we need. It's all about us, so why do we need to give thanks to God, or to Jesus who declares himself to be the very bread of life? It's all science now, right? We control it all, right?

In the book of Deuteronomy we hear Moses remind the Israelites that it was God who provided food for them in the desert, not him. It was God to whom they should be thankful, not to him. This message, or law, of Deuteronomy is, don't get too full of yourself - God gave you everything that you have - your freedom, your food and your very life.

Remember where your sustenance comes from, people.

The 65th psalm reiterates this sentiment - be thankful to God for it is God who provides everything you have. Not only that, but the whole earth is grateful. The ends of the earth bow down in praise to God's almighty power - the power to calm the waves and to create the mountains, who levels it furrows and sprinkles the crops. God's almighty name be praised. Alleluia.

In 2011 when we recite this psalm we do so and appreciate the unbridled gratitude that it expresses. But what does it mean to us when the psalm says "the hope of all the ends of the earth"? Surely we don't envisage an actual end of the earth, a place from which the water tumbles over and off of a sharp edge never to be seen again. Or, like in the C.S. Lewis movie based on the Dawn Treader, a place

where the water just flows into an uphill, never ending water fall. Well, 2000 years ago the might have envisioned just that, after all, the earth was flat.

There was no science in the time of the scriptures. As we can hear in this psalm they still thought that the earth was flat and that earthquakes were caused by God's wrath and not by tectonic plates running up against each other deep under the earth. So with all of this knowledge about how the universe actually works is being grateful to God for our bounty still necessary? We know that God does not make it rain nor make the sun shine so why should we give God any credit?

Because God created it. Whether you dispel the big bang theory or evolution or whether you embrace them as absolute those of us gathered here today accept that none of this scientifically proven existence would be possible without the hand of God. We have the illusion of control and sometimes it goes to our head.

But really do we need to give God all of the credit? Do we need to give thanks to God when in fact our Canadian bountiful harvest arrives on the backs of innovation, careful planning and a little bit of luck with weather patterns?

Yes.

We are commanded to give praise to God and to give God thanks for all we've been given. This is not either or, it's both and. We know how earthquakes begin and how the direction of the winds are formed but this knowledge does not stop us from giving thanks to God for having a hand in it all.

And why do we gather here on Sunday's to praise, worship and give thanks to God when science can very nearly explain all of the mysterious phenomena which in the past was attributed only to God? Because God asked us to. Because God, the God who loves us and cherishes us asks us to do something that is against the norm of our culture. We gather here not in protest against an unspeakable evil but in hope of a better world. We gather together to praise God, a God who created us, and to hold one another up instead of tearing one another down, which is the favourite pastime of some of our workplaces and communities. We gather together to worship the omnipotent being who breathed life into the earth in its beginning whether that beginning looked like a big bang or a completed orb in our universe. We gather together to thank God for all that we have lest we begin to think that we humans have accomplished all of these discoveries without God's support, love and guidance. We gather together to accept the bread of life without demanding control over what has been offered.

We often talk about the fact that Jesus and his message was radical and counter cultural back in the day. Well, what we are doing here today is radical and counter cultural in the present. We are here to admit that no matter how much we know, how much we discover about the world around us, we are not, cannot be, the top of the food chain. We gather together to lift each other up and to give thanks to God our creator, Christ our bread of life and the Holy Spirit who binds us all together. We are here because, in this place, at this time, we can admit that we are not in control; not in control over the earth or sometimes in our lives. Here in this place and at this time we can admit that we don't know it all and nor do we have to. Here, on a Sunday morning on a glorious day, we give thanks to the one who provides for us all that we need.

And for that we give thanks to God.