

“There’s Good News in a Chocolate Chip Cookie!”

8/2/09 (4)

John 6:27-40

- I. MY MOTHER’S CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES WERE THE BEST COOKIES IN THE WORLD! NO ONE COULD MAKE COOKIES LIKE SHE COULD!
- A. ***As little children we always knew when she was getting ready to bake cookies.***
  1. I remember the anticipation, the intolerable waiting...
    - a. If we were good and did not fight with each other, one of us got to measure out the ingredients,
      - (1) sift the flour,
      - (2) cut the butter...
      - (3) mix up the batter,
    - b. My sister or I helped drop the teaspoons of batter on the greased cookie sheet.
    - c. But the top honor went to the one who got to lick the dirty mixing bowl
  2. If Mom were really mean she would tell us the dough had to chill in the refrigerator for a couple of hours.
  3. Finally, we would sit and watch the clock until the cookies had finished baking in the wood- fired stove. We knew when that was because we could smell them. We waited until the cookies had cooled off.
    - d. The best cookies were brown around the edges,
    - e. still warm inside,
    - f. The soft chocolate would leave a telltale residue on our faces and hands.
  4. But those cookies were still good the next day—or any day! Oh yes! [pause]
- B. ***Now I would like to transfer that memorable image of home-made chocolate chip cookies to the image of all of us eagerly anticipating being invited up front to share Holy Communion***
  1. What if the great gifts of Christ—the bread and the juice—were as delightful and tempting as this offering in my Mom’s kitchen 60 years ago!
    - a. If you could smell the fresh, warm bread, the loaf still uncut, waiting to be broken...
    - b. the juice of the grapes freshly “*squozen*” —that word sounds better than the common word “squeezed”..*squozen* from fresh new grapes.
    - c. One year our 4 youth from the Confirmation class were on a retreat. They were learning about the Lord’s Supper, so I showed them how to prepare juice from fresh grapes -- and the taste was, well, “divine!”
  2. We are told if we really want to find out where the young people, the yuppies and generation X are on Sunday morning in the big city, go down to Starbucks; or in Billings to the City Brew. That is where we will find them...
    - a. with their lattes, capuccinos, iced frappicinos, Café Americana...
    - b. with high speed Wi Fi access terminals for their laptops.
      - (1) and the Wall Street Journal or the Billings Gazette
    - c. One week I was driving south near the Texas coast, toward Corpus Christi on a state highway outside of Houston. I was startled to see a billboard advertisement that said, Coffee Bar—get your latte at the First Presbyterian Church in... ( I do not recall the actual city).
      - (1) A church with an open coffee bar!
    - d. But when I found the church, it was 12:30 pm, I was so disappointed, the doors were locked, no one was there.

3. Maybe if in our church we opened a coffee bar...and had some home-made chocolate chip or peanut butter cookies to GIVE AWAY, and we advertised in "The Courier": "free lattes and home-made cookies this Sunday!"
    - a. wouldn't that be radical? The sanctuary would be filled.
    - b. Arlene Corbin actually suggested this very thing when we had our general meetings to brainstorm and create visions.
  4. Instead, for Communion, we offer our regular paying customers, and those who just drop in, little round unleavened wafers that taste like glue, or tiny cut squares of bread, often stale, that can stick in your throat
    - a. We do not let them tear a fresh warm flavorfilled loaf—that's unsanitary!
    - b. and a tiny glass of Welch's grape juice that is not even a half a shot,
    - c. We want them to believe that ***somehow this is Christ's body/ his blood which is given for you and me?!***
    - d. Now that is what I call a scandal! (PAUSE)
- II. HERE IS THIS PASSAGE IN JOHN 6 WHERE JESUS MAKES THE SEEMINGLY ABSURD CLAIM, "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE...WHOEVER COMES TO ME AND EATS MY FLESH WILL NEVER GET HUNGRY AGAIN, AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER GET THIRSTY."
- A. ***In this sermon Jesus says:***
- a. first of all, that manna Moses gave your ancestors in the wilderness is old stuff. It does not compare to the bread of heaven I will give you,
  - b. Secondly, "you must eat my flesh."
1. Instead of being disgusted like the Pharisees, all the rest of the people eagerly said, "***Lord, give us this bread always!***"
  2. They were like children in their mother's kitchen just dying to be given the warm, gooey chocolate chip cookies with pecans cooling on the counter, which they could smell and see and covet.
  3. This is how John Calvin says you and I should receive each of the sacraments
    - a. to apprehend with each of our senses the wonder of God's goodness and his love for us...
    - b. to see it, to smell it, to taste it, to touch it, maybe even to hear it.
  4. And each time we come to the Table, we remember a story, the old stories way back when
    - a. ...when we were children,
    - b. ...when we were new in this church,
    - c. ...way back when Jesus was in the upper room with the disciples,
    - d. ...when he gave this sermon about the bread of life,
    - e. ...way back when the Israelites left their tents and went around picking up the frostlike pastry manna, chasing and catching live quail at dawn out on the prairie.
- B. ***I believe this amazing claim and promise of Jesus has to be balanced against the passage about the 3 temptations we may read on the first Sunday in Lent.***
1. Recall the first temptation in Matthew 4.
    - a. The devil said to a very hungry Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command this handful of stones to become bread."
      - (i) Really it is a double temptation:
      - (ii) the temptation to doubt himself, that he is truly the Son of God,
      - (iii) the temptation to feed himself through one harmless miracle.

- b. Even though Jesus may conjure up images of what hot fresh bread would taste like, he will have none of it:
  - c. *“You shall not live by bread alone, but by each word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”*
  - d. For Calvin the richness and fullness of “the word of God” and his gift of salvation in Jesus Christ is approximated only—only by the food of the sacraments—
2. And then we have those passages in which Jesus compares the love of a parent/ a father/ for his precious child, by saying,
- a. *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find..For everyone who asks receives, and whoever seeks finds...what (father) is there among you who, if (your) child asks for bread, will offer up a stone?”*
  - b. The language is intentional – *bread, a stone*
  - c. It is the language of the first temptation.
  - d. But in Matthew 7, or in Luke 11, Jesus turns it into a sacramental gift:
    - (l) *“If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give the really good things to those who ask Him!”*
  - e. A fellow pastor at a prayer breakfast told us this story. A man was upstairs terminally ill in the bedroom. His doctors had given him only hours to live, the family had been summoned. His dear wife was down in the kitchen cooking toll house cookies. The dying husband smelled the cookies and said to himself, if it’s the last thing I do, I have to have one of those cookies. So he dragged himself out of his deathbed, out into the hallway with great effort, and tumbled down the stairs. He finally reached the kitchen, and from the floor where he lay he reached up with one hand for a warm chocolate chip and pecan cookie off the counter. His wife slapped his hand and said, “Those are for the funeral dinner!”  
[pause]
3. The problem we have today is that we do not know what gifts to ask for—the good nourishing gifts which both satisfy and sustain, and we do not know where to find them.
- a. So we go to Starbucks, Unique Creations, Brewster’s, Main Street Grind, and to City Brew. We drink lattes, and we squander the coins of the realm for overpriced cookies, a fudge tart, muffins, which are something less than mom makes, or pumpkin bread, a rice crispies bar, or a bagel with cream cheese.
  - b. We eat too much junk food, because it is available real fast, from a drive-through.
4. Sometimes food tastes like, or acts like, a stone! I remember a bike rally— a 77 mile affair in the east Texas Pineywoods. Now a couple of children had some fresh out of the oven chocolate chip and peanut butter cookies for sale at one of the rest stops some 24 miles into the ride. They were 2 for a dollar. I gave in to the devil’s temptation just a wee bit. I bought just two, \$1’s worth. I soon regretted what I had done, Less than 30 minutes later I got sick to my stomach. I knew that cookies were not good for a hard ride.

5. Isaiah asks us a similar question to the one Jesus asks in John 6.
  - a. Isaiah (55.1-2) *“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?  
...Everyone who is thirsty, Come to the waters;  
...And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat, (page 3)  
Yes, come, buy wine and milk...  
...And let your soul delight itself in abundance!”*
6. Where you really ought to be is here in God’s house waiting to be invited as an worthless, hungry beggar to our Lord’s Table to share in his tasty banquet.
  - a. Evangelism is one beggar showing another beggar where to get food.

C. ***I am visualizing a table-- only this one is in the church kitchen downstairs. To my way of thinking, it just might be the most important room in our church!***

1. Isn’t that where a lot of the really important business takes place–
  - a. the morning coffee brewed each Thursday for the quilters
  - b. the PW Harvest Dinner, or the Pastor’s Farewell luncheon,
  - c. the church dinners put together....
2. My first day at my last church in Russellville, Arkansas, at Central Church, it was August 15, a very hot day like in Miles City. I was putting books on the shelf. Someone came to my office and said, “Come with me, I want you to meet the most important person in this church. Do not ever cross here or make her mad at you.” He was the man who ran the kitchen and was in charge of all the Wednesday family night dinners: Jay (and Nancy) Shaw , the kitchen boss and official chef, The other was the lord high commissioner of our Tuesday Night Meal Mission, Shirley Shepard.

III. GUNILLA NORRIS IS AN AUTHOR I HAVE COME ACROSS IN RECENT YEARS. SHE IS A CHRISTIAN THERAPIST AS WELL AS A MEDITATION AND SPIRITUAL TEACHER. SHE HAS A SMALL VOLUME THAT GOES BY THE TITLE, “BECOMING BREAD.” I RECOMMEND HER TO YOU. SHE HAS ALSO WRITTEN BOOKS WITH OTHER SUGGESTIVE TITLES: “INVITING SILENCE,” “AND ONE CALLED, “DOG’S LIFE.”

A. ***I have taken some of her material from “Becoming Bread,” and composed it into a liturgy which I like to use for Holy Communion services.***

1. Gunilla Norris suggests in her poems and prayers in this book that as members of Christ’s gathered body-- we are in God’s kitchen. You and I are ingredients sitting on his counter, just waiting to be put into his mixing bowl and through His Divine Alchemy transformed into some new creation.
2. Once we are baked and ready, or squeezed and pounded and reshaped, we are ready to be served—served to a world that is starving, that stands like dirty-fisted urchins outside the kitchen door or open window, begging for one of those cookies, or a slice of hot bread fresh out of the oven, knowing they probably haven’t got a prayer, and yet... **(PAUSE).**  
***[Note: when not serving Communion, include the following]***
3. ***I invite you now to listen to a portion of the liturgy:*** (page 4)

*Like a good chef with any recipe, I have taken the liberty to mix some of her words or ingredients with some of my own.*

*“As the bread-maker adds flour  
to the water, to the salt and yeast*

*and watches it come alive and rise,  
so Jesus Christ turns and mixes  
and stretches us,*

*pounds and rolls, exposes and twists us.  
He kneads us into shape  
so we may rise again with him  
and live.*

*(page 5)w*

*Hold the fresh bread in your hand—  
feel its texture,*

*he crunch of its crust.*

*break off a piece and eat.*

*Lift the cup to your lips,  
anticipate its flavor; smell its  
freshness*

*take a few sips.*

*We are hungry, we are thirsty.*

*Bless the One who gives,  
bless the one who receives,  
The One who is.*