

# *Sent People*

Sermon on the 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

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St. Stephen's Belvedere

August 16, 2015

[1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14](#)

[Psalm 111](#)

[Ephesians 5:15-20](#)

[John 6:51-58](#)

Today's gospel reading tells us some very important things about life inside and outside Sunday morning worship. From an inside-the-church perspective, there's no doubt that this reading from John's gospel is all about the eucharist. Focusing on the meaning of the eucharist is part of the priestly function and traditionally, priests are more focused on life inside the church. Deacons, on the other hand, focus on life outside the church. That's a simplified description of the difference between priests and deacons, but it generally holds true. After a heavy bout of wrestling, I've come to believe that God created me to be a priest and various communities have called this out in me, too. However, I am ordained as a deacon right now and I'm so grateful for this time because, even after December 5<sup>th</sup> when I'll be ordained to the priesthood, I am getting to more fully explore what has also always been a very strong diaconal call. And just for the record: the whole purpose of being ordained a priest or a deacon is only to remind all baptized people of everyone's priestly and diaconal functions in the world. We don't get ordained for ourselves. We get ordained because we've accepted God's invitation to teach and remind everyone else that they are in fact the real priests and deacons in the world by virtue of their baptism.

Every person sitting here functions sacramentally and as priests. Each of you makes intangible things tangible, blesses people and things by your very presence and actions, and helps others make meaning, give thanks, and especially work for peace and reconciliation. You are all priestly people.

And everyone sitting here also goes out into the world and functions diaconally. In hundreds of ways in your professional and personal lives outside these church walls, you serve those in need in the world. Most recently, Camp Create hosted almost 60 children from the Canal, Marin City, and Hilarita communities. Although the camp happened right here, it was outreach to the community. More than 75 parishioners were involved in this year's camp through donating money and/or what amounted to over 500 hours of volunteer time. That's what diaconal people do; they serve those in need! But why do we do it?

Why have we run Camp Create now for 15 years? Well, part of the reason is that children in public schools get little or no art instruction anymore and we know that art is

necessary to the education of the whole child and in fact allows more of the brain to be accessed for all learning. Another reason we probably do Camp Create is because our Baptismal Covenant calls us to “strive for justice and peace among all people.” And yet another big reason we do Camp Create is to create bridges and build relationships between culturally and socioeconomically diverse groups.

Those are all very good reasons to participate in Camp Create, or any service project for that matter. But to be perfectly honest, a major reason I engage in service, and I wonder if some or all of you do, too, is because I want to meet Jesus. “Meeting Jesus” is really just church lingo. It’s code. What “meeting Jesus” really means is: I want to meet God. I hunger to somehow come close to the mystery we call God. I yearn to approach that thin place where something mysterious and transformative happens. Where I feel connected to something bigger, beyond myself, something characterized by love and wholeness. The reason I say “I want to meet Jesus” vs. “I want to meet God” is that Jesus was made of flesh. What’s unique about Christianity is that our faith tells us that we can meet God in the flesh.

Jesus says today, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

When I imagine Jesus saying these words 2,000 years ago, I can’t help but see him slapping his chest and arms and legs. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven! Don’t you see it? This is what God has done! God has become incarnate, has become human. God isn’t just in the scriptures or in the temple anymore. No. God is right here, right now, in front of you and all around you in the flesh. You can actually touch God. Look!”

When we receive the bread each Sunday we hear words that echo John’s gospel, “The body of Christ, the bread of heaven.” And when we receive the wine, the minister says, “The blood of Christ, the cup of salvation.” Sound familiar? When we ingest the bread and wine, take them into our own bodies, we become what we eat. We become Christ. We become a living sign of God’s love and power to heal.

But this ritual that we partake in has its source in another important line from today’s gospel. Jesus says, “Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.” In this line, we absolutely should not skip over the pivotal verb: sent. The Father sent the Son. God sent Jesus. God initiated a process, not a one-time event. By eating the bread and drinking the wine, we are perpetuating the process initiated by God. When we consume Christ, we become a sent people. Just as God sent Christ, so Christ sends us.

Now, I have a proposition for you. This is an interim period at St. Stephen’s, so as uncomfortable as this may be, it is a time when you’re being asked to stretch and evaluate and try some new things. You may or may not have noticed that I’ve already mixed things up by processing into the service, carrying the gospel book. The reason a deacon or

clergyperson does this is to symbolize that the gospel is coming into the building, not just the book with the printed stories from scripture, but all of the stories from our daily lives as God's people are coming into the worship service. Our lives are the gospel, too.

But, I want to experiment with one more new thing, and this involves your cooperation. You see, the shape of Episcopal liturgy is such that we first gather together to worship God in the church, and then we are sent out into the world to continue that worship in the form of service. We're gathered; and then we're sent. Therefore, at the end of today's service, when the acolyte carrying the cross leads the altar party down the aisle, I invite you to turn as the cross goes by. Some people like to reverence the cross first, which is great, but then turn and allow your gaze to follow the cross, so that by the end of the hymn we're all facing the open doors of the church. What this simple shift of your body position does is change your focus from inside the church to the idea that you are now following Christ out into the world. You will be positioned as sent people who will answer the diaconal call to go out and meet God in the flesh. And when I give the dismissal saying, "Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit," you'll have a new orientation when you respond with, "Thanks be to God."

***Amen.***