

SPG#211, Pentecost 8B, P. 12

July 26, 2009

2 Samuel 11:1-15

Ephesians 3:14-21

John 6:1-21

Every so often through words in the scripture we see again how every day people who were spiritually affected in Christ become the Church.

We see again how the followers of the first century by virtue of their encounter with Jesus before and after the resurrection were profoundly affected. We see how followers like Paul encountered Jesus after the days of the twelve disciples, and how profoundly they were affected. And in that seeing into the following of Jesus by different people we see how we ourselves are invited into our own following. And so it becomes a task with two parts. In the first place we look back at the scripture. In the second we look how those stories and accounts apply to our own following, our faith. And in some cases it seems to be something that makes sense, something that follows logically. But at the same time that study of following includes spiritual encounter, something that is not logical and predictable.

Today's account from the gospel of John records the feeding of the 5,000. And the feeding of people is not a tremendous mystery because it was a meal time, and the people were hungry. But it was astonishing that Jesus fed all of them with a few loaves of bread and some fish. Also in today's gospel, following the story of the feeding of the 5,000 is the story of Jesus being seen by the disciples as he walked on the water.

Now we could say that of course Jesus was involved in supernatural things. After all, he is identified as the Son of God. And so it should be no surprise that he could heal people, walk on the water, even bring the dead back to life.

And so in our following we just need to accept who he is and let it go at that. But then in Ephesians today we have Paul's words. He says, **I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

Paul seems to be saying that by virtue of our being followers that we have access to knowing that is beyond just having information. In fact, I think we can say that he is praying that we do have that extraordinary knowing in Christ. Let me read the whole passage, and you will see what I mean. **I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**

So I think via today's epistle that we can say that Paul had high hopes for the comprehending of all of us who follow Jesus Christ. And he did not just want this. He fervently looked for it and prayed for it.

And I think, as we consider the story of the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on the water, that he would be praying for our extraordinary knowledge in both stories.

Probably the central clue in all of this is Paul's phrase, **to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**. So, it is not knowledge by figuring it out. It is not knowledge primarily from being smart. It is knowledge that comes by our association with Christ, the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

As a test, we could ask how we could apply this knowledge through association with Christ to our lives right here and now. In the past year or better we have begun feeling the effects of the economic downturn. So, the Long Range Planning Committee has recommended that we chew on smaller bites for what we want to do. At the same time, we lost our Church Secretary, but we gained a wonderful new one. We are facing economic leaner times. But an individual paid for our new sound system. And an individual paid for the restoration of the organ. But at the same time our organist resigned. What does it all mean? Well, I have been waiting for the answer to that. So, it is OK for you to go ahead and tell me now.

Seriously, I think there is a meaning there. I think there is a knowing there that can be had because of our association with Christ. But it may not come in a sermon. It may come in a conversation among 2 or 3 of us. Who knows?

That knowledge that comes via our association with Christ does not tend to come from one person. In a church it tends to emerge in our lives.

So, in regard to the extraordinary knowing in Christ, there is no sermon, no teaching, no writing that is more crucial than what goes on in the hearts of the faithful.

What goes on in the hearts of the faithful and what comes to be because of that is the Church. It is knowledge that emerges. An example: God takes care of St. Paul's. I know that because every time we have a loss as a church, we have a gain as well. Do I know that because I am brilliant? Certainly not. I know that because I can see it happening. And I believe it happens because of our association with Christ.

If Paul were speaking of a different body, other than the Church, then he most likely would speak in different terms. But he is speaking in specific terms about a certain organization, the Church. So he is very specific in talking about his vision of a spiritual focus that goes with it, an association with Christ.

But, via St. Paul's words today, we need to know what is in the hearts of the faithful. Part of what we will do here will be figured out as that which makes the most sense. But part of it will emerge as we share among ourselves. It could emerge as an "Aha!" from one of us. It could emerge as a logical next step. Or it could emerge as something as outrageous as Jesus walking on the water.

By virtue of your association with Christ, what is the pulse of your spiritual life? What are you hoping for? What are you praying for? What is on your heart? What are the graces and gifts that are part of you? That feedback, those insights, that sharing is gold waiting to be refined. In all of it ministry will be done. We will care for each other and others, and the Church will be built. May God open our eyes more to the extraordinary knowing in Jesus Christ. Amen.