Why Do You Follow Jesus?

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Year B, Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 13
John 6:24-35
Grace Episcopal Church, Pemberton and St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Lumberton, NJ

Last week, we encountered Jesus as he was feeding the five thousand. He took five barely loves and two dried pieces of fish, gave tanks for them, and turned what seemed so inadequate and turned it into a great abundance. Now, there were those in attendance who wanted an encore of this sign. So, they follow Jesus and his disciples to Capernaum. They track Jesus down and ask him, “When did you get here?” Jesus, however, knows something about their motives for following him. He says to them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you had your fill of loaves.”

Because you had your fill of loaves…

You recall that last week, everyone had their fill of food, even leftovers (twelve baskets full to be exact). These individuals that followed Jesus wanted a repeat performance. Their physical stomachs were filled in a way that they haven’t been filled before. They wanted their material needs met yet again, and if Jesus is the prophet he says he is, then he can fill them once again, just as their ancestors received their fill of mana from God as they traveled in the wilderness from Egypt to their promised homeland. Jesus, however, was not in the business of filling people with empty wants and desires. Jesus was in the business of filling people with himself. Jesus wanted people to follow him for the sake of being with him, to be in his eternal presence. “Do not work for the food that perishes,” he says, “but for the food that endures for eternal life.” He’s saying do not work for things of this world that fill you and leave you wanting, but for the food that endures. And what is the food that endures? It’s Jesus himself. “I am the bread of life”, he says.” “Whoever come to me will never be hungry. Whoever comes to me will never be thirsty.”

How often do we examine ourselves and ask, “Why do I follow Jesus?” It can be tempting to follow Jesus just to receive the bread of the world and for some personal gain. There are corners of the church that preach what is called the prosperity gospel, a message that says if you pray enough, if you believe enough, and if you give enough money, then you will get your hearts desires. Jesus then becomes just a vending machine, vending out our wants and desires. But we are called to follow Jesus first and foremost to be with him. We follow him because he leads to a life that never ends and satisfies a hunger in a way that the world can’t. The world tells us we need more money, more goods, more power to be filled, yet those things at the end of the day leave us empty.

One thing that drew me to The Episcopal Church is the focus on the Eucharist. In this meal, we are reminded of the main reason why we follow Jesus Christ. We follow him to feed on him so we can receive eternal life here and now in this troubled world. We follow him to consume and digest him into the very fiber of our being so we can be a reflection here on earth of what it is like in heaven.

So why do you follow Jesus? Ask yourself this question and may your wrestling with this question help you consume more deeply the bread of life. Amen.