

10 Pentecost Proper 13

5 Aug 2012

Even though I was on vacation last week, I just had to spend time preparing for today's sermon. This time, though, I decided to involve my family. It was an easy enough decision. You see, last Monday we all loaded into the car and drove to Niagara Falls. So, since we were all in the car, I figured I had a captive audience!

Whether they wanted to hear it or not, I read them the Gospel reading and started to explain a bit of the background. That's when Sophie said something that I've been thinking about ever since.

You see, I told her this week we read how the crowd kept searching for Jesus. How in last week's reading we were told that they wanted to make him king, and so Jesus escaped to a mountain to be alone. Then Jesus went across the sea of Galilee to rejoin his followers and this week we see that the crowd has finally caught up to him.

That's when she asked a very interesting question: Why didn't Jesus want to be king?

You'd think that after all these years of studying the Bible, I would have had a quick and easy answer for her.

But I didn't.

So far as I can tell, there is no quick and easy answer as to why Jesus did not want to be made king. Why Jesus would run away from the crowd that wanted to make him king. Why the crowd continued searching for him.

And so I came clean to her and said, "You know what, honey, I really don't know. I mean, we now refer to him as "King", that's what Christ means - king. But, I'm not sure why he ran away from the crowd in this case. I'm sure he must have had a very good reason, though."

What stuck out most for her, was the fact that Christ means king. She thought that was pretty neat. So, she repeated the name King Jesus a couple of times. And that was pretty much the end of the conversation. After all, we were on vacation.

But, from time to time this last week, I've been wondering about the reasons Jesus ran away when they wanted to make him king.

Of course, in so many ways, it just seems right.

Jesus, the humble man not wanting to be made king.

Jesus the prophet of God, not wanting the people to think he was just another king like all the other kings.

Jesus, who was offered kingship of the entire world by Satan while he was being tempted in the desert.

Now, if Jesus would say no to Satan, then certainly he would resist the crowd wanting to make him king.

But why all this refusal to be king? Especially since we now call him Christ?

Well, one thing that is for certain is that John, the Gospel writer, certainly wants us to know that Jesus is Christ. In our reading for today, Jesus pretty much comes right out and tells the crowd that he has been sent from God, that God's stamp of approval is on his ministry.

Now, we would almost think that would be enough. The crowd wants to make him king. They finally find him and he pretty much tells them that God has sent him. The crowd knows that Jesus has been performing some incredible miracles.

Last week's reading started by telling us that Jesus' fame as a healer had spread enough that whenever he was around, great crowds of people brought the sick to him to be healed. So, last week, just as the great Passover festival was about to begin, Jesus added yet another incredible sign - he fed the 5000. It's after all the healings and that incredible feeding of 5000 on the eve of Passover, the crowd is anxious to find him.

And when, as we see in this week's reading, that they do find Jesus, and he tells them that he has been sent by God, now the real conversation begins.

Because this is happening at Passover, and because the longed-for messiah was supposed to deliver Israel just as Moses delivered them from Egyptian slavery, the crowd has to know if Jesus is the new Moses. The crowd is hanging on his words - they've seen incredible things that he's done. They think maybe they are about to be freed from Roman slavery.

And so they ask him what they should do.

It's easy enough to imagine what they were thinking he'd say - take up arms. Rebel against the Romans. Cast off your chains and be free.

But that's not at all what he told them.

We read that he told them simply to believe in him. Believe that God has sent him. And that, it seems, is just too much to ask. It seems that way because then we read about their bizarre request for a sign - they've already seen so many, and yet they ask for another sign!

Was it pride or arrogance on their part that caused them to make such a request?

Whatever it was, Jesus begins to turn their preconceived ideas totally on its head. Jesus begins to tell them that whatever their expectations are, God will give them the thing they truly need.

God gives the world the bread of life. God gives Jesus to the world.

But I haven't said much more than what's right in front of you and there for you to read for yourself. I've done this extended summary for a couple reasons. First off, these words of Jesus stood as a challenge to those Galileans and still remains a challenge for us. And, secondly, because next week's reading is going to skip a few verses ahead and so we won't get a chance to read how Jesus finishes up this Bread of Life conversation.

You see, the story doesn't end simply with Jesus saying "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Jesus goes on by saying, "I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives to me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day."

You see, Jesus most certainly is king. But he most certainly is not a king that will conform to what the world thinks a king should do. He ran away from being made king because no human being can make Jesus king. God has already done that.

We believe that Jesus was there at the beginning of creation - the firstborn of all creation. That means that Jesus has always been king. It seems he's just been waiting, and waiting patiently, for the world to catch on.

Waiting for us to catch on. Waiting for us to accept the bread of life. Waiting for us to recognize what true kingship is all about. Amen.