

SEA FOOD DIFFERENTLY

“Sea food differently.” This tagline from Red Lobster makes us pause and reconsider what we just heard and read. Is it s-e-e or s-e-a or perhaps both. A cute advertising jingle or perhaps a reminder that when two or more of us read or hear the same things we don’t always understand them the same way.

This was brought home to me this week when I sent an email to a small group. A phrase that I thought was empowering, affirming and life-giving, someone else saw as offensive and distressing. Certainly not my intent but that was how the other person saw, read and understood it.

Jesus said and did things throughout his life and ministry that people saw, heard and understood differently. Some responded positively and some did not. Perhaps that is one reason that when the two disciples heard John the Baptist say “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” and those two disciples then turned and followed Jesus, Jesus said to the disciples: “What are you looking for?”

We are each looking for different things in different ways from Jesus. Oh, maybe the big things like salvation and eternal life are the same, but the way we understand those concepts and how we get to them is likely to differ depending upon our background and our life experiences, including our experience of the church as an institution.

The ways we understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus is likely different depending upon our skills and talents- our gifts. As Paul reminds us, we are all one in the body but we are different parts of the same body. If each of us were ears, who could speak? If each of us were mouth, who could hear? We need each part- we need each of our gifts to be the image of God incarnate. Together we are more than we are individually. We should never denigrate or discount another. Perhaps the other puts together the newsletter differently than I do but it’s still the newsletter. Perhaps the other sets the table differently than I do but this is still the table of the Lord where we all come to be united with God and with each other in our remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

John the Baptist calls Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” even as he says twice in this passage from the Gospel of John that “I myself did not know him.” This seems quite at odds with our understanding from the Gospel of Luke that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, were cousins. How could John the Baptist then not know Jesus, his own cousin?

How much do we really know another person? If you listen to the news after a mass or serial killing, often neighbors and even friends will respond: but he seemed like such a nice person or I never would have guessed she could have done such horrible things. As much as we think we know someone else, often we don’t, really.

Years back, when the wrist band craze was getting going, there were wrist bands with “WWJD” –or “what would Jesus do” - on them. Intended to serve as a visible and tangible reminder that our lives should be lived in response to the teachings of Jesus, some received that purpose positively and some did not.

A young girl became quite upset over this movement and in conversations with her pastor over time it turned out her quandary was “how do I know what Jesus would do?” Well, the pastor replied, “we look to the Bible to tell us.” “Yes”, she replied, “but Jesus was fully human and fully divine and I am not, so I don’t know what Jesus would do because I’m not what he was.”¹ She has a good point.

So what do we do? Perhaps we are like the disciples who turned and followed Jesus once John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God. Jesus asks them: “What are you looking for” but like those two disciples, our first question is along the lines of “where are you staying?” And Jesus responds to us as he responded to them: “Come and see.”

Jesus does not stop and give a lecture. He does not explain what he is about. He does not explain what it is going to mean to be called the Lamb of God- a sacrifice for the whole world. Jesus does not warn the disciples that following him will mean their death.

Rather, Jesus says: “Come and see.” Experience a life of faith and trust in God. Don’t live only in your head but involve your heart. Reach out and touch the sick and the lame. Offer soup to those who are hungry.

Yesterday we offered soup to some of our first responders in thanksgiving for the hard work that our police and dispatchers do in keeping us safe and our community one of order where we can walk at night without fearing a drive-by shooting. It’s not an easy job to be a policeman or woman or to be the dispatcher who receives the calls of distress and then has to make sure someone responds appropriately. Life is messy and often full of hurt, shame, stupid acts by people that don’t think – and everything else that makes life uneven and hard at times.

Jesus calls those two disciples just as he calls us to “come and see.” Don’t be passive. Don’t just read about Jesus and do nothing but think about Jesus. Don’t live only in your head. Get up and act. Engage your body and your soul. Get up and be part of this community. Be a disciple and witness to the love of God for you and for me and for all of God’s creation.

Becoming a disciple- one who witnesses to the good news of God in Christ- starts with hearing and then responding to God’s call. Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, uses the word “call” or “called” 4 times in our short passage from the Letter to the Corinthians today. He was, as we might say, pounding home the message that we are involved in a relationship with God. One of call-and-response. God calls us to respond – and will keep calling, nudging, pushing – until we do. Paul reminds us that our lives are enriched when we recognize that we have gifts and talents that can be used to make our lives and the lives of those around us better. We live not only for ourselves but also for the good that we can do in this time and this place.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is a lifelong endeavor. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ works out in different ways for each of us. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ usually means some kind of transformation.

¹ Rodger Nishioka in Feasting on the Word, Year A Volume 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 262.

Isaiah 49:1-7; Ps.40:1-12; 1 Cor. 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

When Andrew turned from following John the Baptist to following Jesus, he realized that in Jesus the world was seeing something new and important. And Andrew went and got his brother Simon, telling Simon “we have found the Messiah.”

Andrew brought Simon to Jesus “who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).” Before Simon even opens his mouth, before Simon even experiences a healing by Jesus or witnesses the work that Jesus can and does do, Simon begins his journey of transformation by being renamed: Simon Peter. The one on whom, despite –or perhaps because of - his human frailties, Jesus will build the church.

Discipleship involves transformation. Metanoia: a turning around. A refocusing upon Jesus as Christ. And yes, it’s true that as we are not fully human and fully divine, we cannot know the mind of Jesus and we cannot ever be absolutely, positively, sure that what we are doing is what Jesus would do.

We can, however, read and study and discuss the Word of God and act in accordance with that understanding. And when we realize that how we understand the Word of God is not how someone else understands it, we can relax into that discussion and learn from another’s perspective. As humans, we will not always be right even when we think we are. As humans, we can only do our best and trust in God to know our hearts. Each time at this table, as we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, when the priest’s hands are washed, signifying the cleansing of ourselves, a phrase is said from the Psalms: “Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and restore in me a right spirit.”

With a clean heart and right spirit, we can move forward even though we “see food differently.” Come and see. Be transformed. Know that God is with you as you seek to love and serve the Lord. *Amen.*