

John 6:35-51 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" ⁴³ Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ 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."

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John 6: 35, 41-51

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“Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said. 'One can't believe impossible things.'

'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'”

Author Lewis Carroll welcomed children of all ages into Alice’s Wonderland, and then he invited readers to peer, not just “at,” but “through” the looking glass to imagine what was on the other side. The gospel writer John is the one who does the same for us. As the lectionary has had us wandering through this sixth chapter since the end of July, the crowds are asked to believe increasingly impossible things, and so are we. First they are impressed as Jesus takes a boy’s lunch and feeds 5,000 people. Then they are confused as he walks out across a stormy sea to meet the disciples in their boat. Now, he’s just talking crazy talk. He might as well be the Queen of Hearts who announces that she believes as many as six impossible things before breakfast, because the crowd has already concluded that he’s the Maddest of Hatters.

He knows that they are questioning who he is, and that they doubt what he’s done, but he just won’t shut up. Jesus announces that he is the bread sent from heaven, and whoever comes to him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty. Believe in me, he says, and you will receive the gift of eternal life!

It's his audacity that they don't like. From the way John tells this sequence of events, it seems as though they'd have to be blind NOT to see. Feed the 5,000 – check. Walk on water – OK? Claim Son-ship of the divine and then announce that you are God's bread sent from heaven – nope. The crowds start to complain. This is just Jesus, and we've known Jesus. He's Joseph's son, Mary's boy. He's of no consequence. He's not even from Jerusalem. He's just a small town nobody from nowhere.

But Jesus has absolutely no qualms about claiming that he is God's son. And now that we're more than 2,000 years this side of Christianity, that doesn't seem like a blasphemous thing for him to say. In fact, it would be more likely for a self-claimed Christian to call someone a heretic who DIDN'T believe that Jesus was the Son of God. However, what if what Jesus really meant was that each one of us is bound to God through this unconditional, parental love? What if we are all meant to be the bread sent from heaven – his body, broken to pieces, for the healing of today's world? What if we're not just to believe in him, but to begin to believe in ourselves that we are loved, by God, that much?

Children seem to understand and internalize this news better than adults. Adults grow up and get crusty. Love is something you have to earn, not something freely given. Hmm... let's remember what Jesus said – he promises eternal life both here and elsewhere, but elsewhere he ties the ability to enter the Kingdom of God to being child-like. Indeed, it was in reading a story about a child that confirmed for me what Jesus is really communicating to us in this text. Being that I'm a Mother as well as a pastor, I faithfully read the "Momastery" blog by Glennon Doyle Melton. Her intense honesty about faith and parenting makes me either laugh or cry, but often both. She writes about living a "brutiful" existence, noticing always that the world can be both brutal and beautiful at the same time.

So here's this week's story. Glennon's youngest daughter, Amma, had been sporting a bright green blob in the middle of her forehead for four days. As a Mom, I understand, you have to have patience with these sorts of things. She let it go for awhile, but this is about the time she thought that perhaps her daughter was in need of a shower. After the shower, when Amma got out, and dried off in her snuggly towel, the parenting crisis was solved, the green blob was gone. Score for team Mom – a freshly showered, blob-less kid. Who wouldn't want credit for that? Parenting in today's world is, in fact, a highly competitive sport!

Well at least that blob was gone until she went to her room, and immediately returned to the kitchen with a new, brighter green blob drawn onto her forehead. Glennon's response to her daughter was, "Sister, I give up, what's up with the green blob?" And Amma responded, "I'm a CHILD OF GOD Mom. My green is to remember. So I can be brave."

Glennon was amazed that her daughter had made herself into a SACREMENT – remembering, just like with Ash Wednesday, that we are marked. The blob was a reminder: I'm God's. I can be brave. (www.momastery.com, from 8/4/2015)

Jesus also chose to reveal his mark to the world. He was, is, and always will be our SACREMENT, our bread from heaven. He did not shy away from the truth that he was God's Son. Hard to believe? Impossible maybe? We could complain, and protest, and deny – just like the crowds. OR, we could choose to be more like Amma, little and dependent, but knowing in her heart that she belongs, she is marked, she is God's.

And being marked, being loved, can make us brave and fill us with the imagination to do impossible things, not only imagine those impossible things as an exercise before breakfast. Jesus blew the crowds away, not just by feeding them and breaking the laws of physics, but by

claiming that he was a gift given to the world, a gift of love for all future generations. When we look at the looking glass, we see a partial image of who we are, but can we go through the mirror to see will come next?

Former NPR correspondent Eric Weiner was sent on a spiritual quest by a hospital nurse who asked him, “Have you found your God yet?” Along that journey, he test drives several religions, trying to really seek and search for the God who would speak to him. In one particularly astute observation, he says, “We don’t see what we are convinced does not exist.” (Man Seeks God, p. 320) Sometimes, we do have to suspend what we think we know, to imagine the full range of possibilities. If we are convinced that something does not exist – it probably won’t ever in our observations.

I have been delighted over my three years here so far, to see us, as a congregation imagining and then doing things that maybe we once thought were impossible for a church of this size. We’re planning our third Ash Grove Women’s retreat at Richmond Hill. We have become a model teaching church for seminary students. We are helping a young woman transition from abject poverty to successfully working to support her own needs. We have cared for each other deeply in times of distress, and we have shared one another’s joy. Are these impossible things? Not exactly, but sometimes we lose track of God’s love for us. We forget that we are meant to be that bread of life, sent from heaven, so that we can feed one another.

Jesus was teaching us who we could be, and it seems impossible to hear. That’s why John’s gospel is also quick to tell us that many people couldn’t hear, didn’t hear, or heard just enough to be afraid. I want you to continue to hear, because hearing is exactly what will remind us of just how loved we are. That’s why I use the monastic blessing so often that concludes with

the stanza, “May God bless you with just enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this old world, so that you will do those things that others say cannot be done.” Imagine the impossible. Believe in Jesus who stretches our imaginations. And you will do amazing, surprising things! Amen.