

**Matins, Aug. 2, 2015 – John Peters**

Ps. 51.1-12, Jn. 6.24-35, Eph. 4: 1-16.

**Theme. ONE: body, Spirit, Lord, faith, baptism, God.**

Prayer: God of comfort and love, May the utterances from my mouth be of your Spirit, richly seasoned with words of grace, gentleness and love. Amen.

Upon reading the NT texts, my response was, “This is straight forward writing. It is easy to understand.” There is no need for a sermon. Why don't we simply all go and sit someplace in the church, or on the lawn outside, read the texts individually from two translations for about 8 minutes, then return inside, and discuss our learnings.” I do not have the personal stamina to adopt this change, nor do I have the permission of MT and the Worship Comm. Do read the passages this afternoon.

There are at least two lessons from our readings, one from John, the other from Ephesians. We expand the narrative Ben spoke about last Sunday about five loaves and two fish feeding 5,000 people. They ate as much as they wanted. They loved it. Then this Bread and Fish Provider disappeared, somewhere by himself. The disciples left in boats, in the absence of Jesus. The people searched for him, then risked taking boats on the lake to another small port, tracked him down, then asked him a question which Jesus did not answer. They were clear in one thing. They wanted more food. Jesus makes it extremely clear that his mission, as God's Son, was not to fill the human requirements of food. We may readily expand that a bit. It was not to give someone a restful night's sleep from out of the cold. Nor a shelter over someone's head, or even the healing of the body. The larger population did not understand that Jesus' bread was more than to fill the belly, to satisfy needs to keep this body functioning. They did not get it, very much the same way that I so, so very often do not get what Jesus attempts to teach me.

Quite specifically, from the John reading I did understand something. The giving of food to needy people, as the Kitchener Soup Kitchen does to 300 people daily, the building of houses for needy people, as Habitat for Humanity and two other agents we know well, do, the providing of hospice care as TheWorking Centre does, and the loaning of money for small business purposes, as another group which we all know does, these are not the prime or significant actions of the kingdom of God here on earth! We are engaged in such practices, and hesitate to speak proudly of this work. In the John passage these activities really do not come close to Jesus' real purpose and goal. We cannot use the bread and fish stuff, the night's sleep, as a substitute for Jesus' real work. Let's get the real story. As Care Groups, and as a Church, we may wish to ponder, discuss and think about this perspective even more.

The people in this crowd knew the Talmud well. They were religious people. Moses was their hero from God. This man fed manna in the wilderness. In fact, the Moses act was far superior to what Jesus had done on this occasion. In Moses' time there was a much greater population- a whole nation, not a mere 5,000. It lasted for 40 years, not simply one meal. There was no need to pick manna and meat on the Sabbath: Friday's gathering, in a peculiar way lasted, without fermentation, until Sunday morning. Manna came from **heaven**- no 2 fish and 5 barley loaves as the source from within the crowd.

These folk were looking for a Messiah. Along with a deliverance from the rule of the Romans, they thought they might have this 'God provided Messiah' supply them with daily bread as did Moses. They had their own very deep rooted perception of how God was going to fix their predicament, a comment Gordon clearly made two weeks ago. Often when I have a problem, I tell God how to fix it. At times I am generous and give God two options. God does not address our problem our way. God's supreme way and manner often surprises us. Let us leave our troubled areas fully and completely to God.

To these people, Jesus makes one quick correction. The manna, these “thin flakes like frost on the ground,” did not come from Moses, but rather from God. Let us not substitute human agents as the source of our resolutions, of whatever nature, for the real Divine source.

The Father God is offering you and me better bread than what Moses gave to the people in the desert. Better bread than that provided by our current employer, better education than what we receive from your learning

institution, and better recreation from whoever that provider might be. It is bread from heaven. It is bread that gives LIFE. It is the I AM who gives this bread.

We have tasted this Life bread several times? Let us try making it your daily diet. That's Christ's wish for us.

The people asked for a sign. But they had just witnessed a sign. 5,000 people had just been fed with at least a 12 to 30 thousand dollar meal. Yet they wished another sign. Looking for signs does show a degree of faith, more than that of an atheist. However it does not have a deep and lasting base.

The John passage is consistent with the whole writing of this book. The author wants the people to have deep faith. John's gospel was the last of the gospels to be written. It was written in the 80s or 90s. Things had changed radically since Jesus time on earth. The Holy Spirit had made a significant difference. Jesus was often in the synagogue in his time, listening or speaking. At the time of the writing of this text, Christians were being persecuted by synagogue people. Some bore the persecution, others remained secret Christians within their synagogue. The writer's mission was not so much on evangelism but upon believers maintaining their faith. This is the book of John. And it is for us at WN.

..... Now to a second meal or second Living Bread meal from the book of Ephesians. John is the appetizer. The Ephesian meal is a bit heavier than the first meal. A simple reading presents us with four themes all woven together: 1. One, one, One-repeated. 2. The Body of Christ, or the church. 3. LOVE (put that in capitals). 4. the church has gifts.

We do have gifts. We gave evidence of this in the June 21 service here, when five people, all age 12 were clearly told, by parents, of their commendable gifts! The gifts identified were not those we generally talk about in church. Parents wanted to see these gifts nurtured and developed. In the Ethiopian church this Ephesian passage is well known. There is a clear distinction between pastor, evangelist, teacher. My very dear friend, Yimenu, told me he was called to be a teacher four years ago. He has now obtained an MA degree from the country's seminary, and has just been installed as a teacher at MK College. He takes great joy in exercising his gift within the church.

In our churches we have used this passage to identify gifts for individuals. Eph. 4 does not do this. These gifts are in the context of the church. Here the text says the gift is not focused upon the person, upon the individual, an interpretation we have had for decades. It is for the Church. The church is the Body of Christ. It is high and holy. It represents Christ here on earth. So we revere the church, we give it esteem, we respect it, we pray for it.

Our Eph. passage tells us the correct life habits that are good within the church community. I heard and attempted to keep these prescriptions for good Mennonite church life from childhood. I was taught within the home and church, that I was different than other people. I was God's child, not a child of this world. This belief in God gave certain expectations: Sunday observance, obey parents, respect older people, attend church, read the Bible, pray, tell the truth, seek baptism, and this is by immersion. Some practices were avoided, also in the context of home/church teaching. Do not swear, lie, cheat, play cards, drink alcohol, gamble, attend movies, smoke (that was my brand of Mennonite church life). Add one more, sexual purity. (In childhood that was a bit of mystery to me.) (In my school class in grade three we did some movement to one of Strauss' waltzes. Hearing of such "sinful dancing" my parents wrote to my teacher, forbidding me to participate. Strangely, the beautiful tune of that waltz remains within me to this day! I had some growing up to do! With time I realized that as a member in God's church my practices had a strong tone of rigidity. I learned and struggled with church practices in other cultures, other times, places, even social classes. The contrast became very pronounced in living, first with Brazilians, and later with jungle Yanomami. The diversity within WN came at a much later date.

The words from Ephesians call us to a higher level than childhood "to do" behaviour. The call is clearly identified as: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another. Our livelihood in the church body is a divine calling, always showing the characteristics of, and working hard at keeping the unity of the Spirit. This is not for the sake of keeping good social relations with one another, preventing quarrels in the neighbourhood, and avoiding the police from our homes. As believers we maintain these remarkable qualities as humility, for the

sake of Christ and the Church. It is a oneness that is the hallmark- one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Father who is above all and IN all! Whew! Amazingly we have been given grace from God to do this!

There is a breadth in “ONENESS” I find in WN church which warms my heart. I recognize that we are favourably disposed to a number of non-Mennonite churches. We are open to a specific Presbyterian church. We join with them in a summer children's program. We speak favourably of the Roman Catholic church. They are not an “other” group to us. Though we are not on the same page with them in terms of church governance, and respect to our holy Mother, and praying for the dead, we know of a oneness. Orthodox church also have some oneness with us.

The means of showing these characteristics of grace and humility, such as bearing one another, is through LOVE! Broxi of the Meeting Place in Oakville spoke well on this topic at the World Assembly, one week ago Saturday. Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury states that we do not know God by thought, but only by love. God gives us this love. Our gifts for the church are given to us by God. This unity of faith, the full knowledge of Christ, is that we might be Christ-like. And God gives us this enablement to be Christ-like. We speak the truth in love. Thus we grow into Christ, into the Body of Christ. The whole body is joined together, is knit together. Such action is the growth of the Body of Christ, the church. All done in love! We are to be robust in love! Thus we grow healthy in God.

The call within the church is to pour ourselves out to one another in acts of love: in humility, in patience. Agape love is the character of the common life of the church (2 Tim. 4.2). Not passively or fatalistically, but in genuine love.

This humility and love within the church keeps us in step with one another. We seek the interest of others, not of ourselves. We are not in competition with one another in the church. The commentator Stephen Fowls states, “...if we are satisfied with a fractured body, we have not understood the passage”. He gives a second thought to ponder, “We are to be grieved by our own disunity as our disunity must grieve the Spirit”. This life within the church, this body of unity, is all predicated upon a right relationship with God. Jesus was humble in heart. Moses was an exceedingly gentle person (Nu. 12.3).

Our words are not to be of personal piety but to a corporate living community. Our purpose is to have the church grow in Christ. People are at different places in their faith, in their maturity, in church relations. And as a church we recognize and acknowledge this. God wants diversity not homogeneity. We are to be holy and blameless before God. Our baptism joins us in oneness with Christ in his death, resurrection and new life. (Rom. 6. 1-11).

We close with words from John Bell, a song sung at the World Assembly:

“One is the body and one is the Head, one is the Spirit by whom we are led;

one God and Father, one faith and one call for all”. One is the Body, p. 72, STJ.