

## THE POWER OF “THE ORDINARY”

Pentecost 12-B

August 12, 2018

John 6:35, 41-51

It can be challenging to be the hometown person who makes it big. People who “knew you when...” might well have some stories to tell that are not so flattering. And, as soon as it hits some people: “Hey! He’s no better than the rest of us!” one’s credibility tends to be eroded.

It was one thing for Jesus to teach and do healings. But to claim a special relationship with God—“Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me”—comes off as arrogant and blasphemous to the people who are pretty sure they know you. Little wonder that a sizeable group of Jesus’ own people begin to complain.

Of course, Jesus tells them that there’s no need to grumble. But as he begins to explain what it means to be “bread that came down from heaven,” the people are not exactly convinced. As our reading through John’s gospel will reveal, even Jesus’ disciples found it difficult, other followers began to drift away, and even Jesus’ own brothers did not believe everything he was telling them. In fact, many have suggested that if these words of Jesus don’t shock or at least surprise you, you probably aren’t paying attention. [One example comes from David Lose in “Dear Working Preacher” at [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org) posted July 23, 2012]

In our own piety we like to talk about the majesty of God; that is, how God creates and is a part of all that lives in this world. And that very much sounds like God is in, with, and under the ordinary—like the bread and wine we receive at communion, and like the water that washes us in baptism. But we accept it all “in theory” because God can be wherever God wants to be. Yet, when it comes to our own reality, it’s often hard to believe that God is working in us, and even more difficult to accept that God is working through us. We might see ourselves as too ordinary to do great things, but that’s often merely the excuse we give. If we really believe Jesus’ words, then we accept that *it is through God’s action* that we even come to believe, just as it is God’s action in Jesus to feed us with a “bread” that will take us beyond this earthly life.

And perhaps that’s the scariest part: We’re not in charge! We do not control how, why, and when God comes to us. As Jesus tells his hearers, it is by the will and activity of the Father that we come to believe.

Among the audience with Jesus that day were a lot of people who saw Jesus as the common and ordinary guy who seemed more likely to become a carpenter than a spokesman for The Divine. No doubt some felt that if God was trying to use this *mensch* to save the people, they were all doomed!

As the story of Elijah continues beyond this morning’s text, God will make himself known, not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in the silence.

*“Where we expect to see might, God comes in weakness; where we look for God to come in power, God comes in vulnerability; and when we seek God in justice and righteousness...we find God (or rather are found by God!) in forgiveness and mercy.”* [“In the Meantime,” [www.davidlose.net](http://www.davidlose.net), posted August 3, 2015]

As we come forward in a little while, God incarnate in Jesus will make himself known to us in the ordinary, common elements yet again: water at the font, and bread and wine at the Table. And our gathering around the Table will touch all of our senses to remind us that people will most often encounter the face of God, the hands and feet of Jesus, through an ordinary group of people who, by the grace of God, become empowered to do extraordinary things. The church of Jesus continues because there remains much to be done, and we are called and set apart to serve, to bear witness, to bring healing, and to work toward the wholeness of all of God's people. Amen.