

COMFY KICKS
B. HULL SOMERS – BLC – 8.26.18

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18, Ephesians 6:10-20, John 6:56-69

It would not be a stretch to read these Gospel lessons that we have been reading the last few weeks to assume that Christianity is a zombie cult.

There is so much talk of eating flesh and drinking blood that it becomes almost gruesome.

Although we talk about the body and blood of Jesus a lot as Christians, just to be clear: we are not called to be zombies. This is a reminder that reading Scripture in context is key. While our brains go to episodes of the Walking Dead, the folk who Jesus was originally speaking to went to the way that God provided the manna in the wilderness to the wandering Israelites.

The manna that God provided every day for the liberated Israelites was a key defining piece of the relationship between God and God's people to the Jewish community. At their core they were the people who were sustained by the Most High.

How they heard the eating of Jesus' body and blood was not as cannibalistic but rather that Jesus would be what sustained and nourished them – their daily bread.

Jesus is the way that God has chosen to express love in the world. Jesus is the way that God has chosen to show us how to be human. Jesus is the way that God has unpacked all the teachings and revelations of teachers and prophets throughout history.

As Jesus taught on the need of Holy sustenance, however, the disciples realized that, although Jesus may be God's choice to express love to the world, Jesus was not the gateway to victory and stardom some of them had thought. Some hoped that if they got on the bandwagon with the true Messiah that they would have a special reward of power, privilege, and prestige.

But Jesus was telling them that they would be welcomed to be sustained by his peace, joy and grace and that they would be sharing that table with everyone – as equals.

And not only that, but they would not have a special protection against the pain and suffering of the world by following Jesus. Not even Jesus was going to get out of the pain and suffering of the world. He often reminded the disciples that he would have to suffer and die before this whole earthly ministry thing was through. The disciples, like any human being ever – and like US – would have preferred to avoid the pain and suffering, thank you very much. We would like to get a VIP Christian pass that we could flash whenever something bad is about to happen – doctor, stop right there, before you tell me that the biopsy was malignant, let me just show you my VIP Jesus pass...or, depression, I don't think so...you must have ignored my VIP badge...it would also be very helpful if it worked with little things like parking spots and good hair days.

But as it turns out the VIP Jesus pass does not work that way. Rather than helping us conquer our enemies it sets a table with our enemies because, as it turns out, they are also beloved children of God. Rather than always reversing the cancer diagnosis, it provides comfort and grace as we walk through fear and unknowing. Instead of getting us the good parking spots, it reminds us that perhaps someone else needs that parking spot more than we do and stop being so greedy.

That was and is a hard message.

Our Gospel text says that when the disciples fully understood what this meant many of them could no longer continue on with Jesus. They left him. Jesus was not who they had hoped he would be. They went home and resumed their comfortable lives.

Those who remained said it simply: you have ruined us for any other way to live, Jesus, where on earth would we go after we have spent this time with you? You alone hold the words of eternal life.

Philosopher Ken Wilber speaks to these two different expectations of religion. The first is simply meaning and comfort – the disciples that just wanted to have their lives more or less the same, just better and with lots of blessings. This use of religion is very common. It offers something to turn to on dark days and a rule for life but does change anyone from the inside out. The other way, Wilber writes, goes far deeper, “in a usually very, very small minority— religion can have the function of radical transformation and liberation. This function of religion does not fortify the separate self, but utterly shatters it—not consolation but devastation, not entrenchment but emptiness, not complacency but explosion, not comfort but revolution—in short, not a conventional bolstering of consciousness but a radical transmutation and transformation at the deepest seat of consciousness itself.”

The disciples who stayed had experienced this revolution of the soul.

It is a disappointment that we do not get a VIP Jesus pass, it really is. But, I think if we have eyes to see, what we have is even better. What we have is a shattering of meaninglessness. What we have is a hope beyond our imagining.

Sure, it would be great if there was a way to avoid all the inevitable suffering of this world but what Jesus offers is supernatural revolutionary love that boldly walks beside us as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death and is a beacon of light even in the darkest trial.

Living each day being sustained by Jesus we can know that we will be fed for whatever we may face – joy or pain.

One of the things I love about being a pastor and chaplain in the hospital context is that I am not bound to the same rules that the doctors and nurses are when it comes to healing and prognosis. The medical community often looks at someone with a terminal diagnosis as a failure – they – thank God – do their jobs and try to keep us alive and kicking.

But as a spiritual practitioner, I am able to walk into a room where the worst news is shared and still point to hope. That is the Good News. There a way through. Not around. Not over. Not a tranquilizer until the worst is over. A way through in Jesus' love. And no matter the outcome – even if it looks like a human fail like the cross did – there is hope.

This, my siblings in Christ, is the VIP Jesus pass. It is an invitation to have eyes to see and a voice to proclaim that hope is not lost, that no one is unlovable, that grace always comes down and that justice is possible.

And Paul encourages us, in the epistle this morning, to wake up every day ready to proclaim this Good News. He reminds us that we are not to be pitted against one another – one child of God against the other – rather that we are to be working together to fight evil. The powers and principalities of this present darkness: war, genocide, racism, homophobia – all of the phobias – transphobia, islamophobia and the list goes on, climate change, domestic violence, and anything else that threatens the Good News: we belong to God and each other in God's incredible love demonstrated by Jesus so fight for it. Love for it.

Paul encourages us to literally wear our faith like armor in the holy scramble to peace: righteousness as a breastplate to protect our hearts, truth holding it all together around our waists as a belt, a helmet of salvation to protect our thoughts and as a reminder that God's saving work is done for us, and the sword of the Spirit – the Word.

But my favorite part of this holy outfit is the shoes. The shoes, after all, always make the outfit.

The shoes that Paul encourages us to wear is whatever shoes make us most comfortable to proclaim the Gospel of peace.

This does not mean that we have to wear orthopedics or running shoes or anything specific that is only about comfort and practicality. This is a reminder to be ourselves. Shoes tell a lot about someone. They can be subdued or flashy, comfortable or fun, functional or flamboyant. I have friends who feel most comfortable in impossibly high wedged platforms and others who wear only flats, some who wear flip flops in December and others whose running shoes go with everything.

This call to wear whatever makes us comfortable is a beautiful honoring of our individuality and the amazing gifts that we each bring to the Body of Christ. We celebrate these differences as we live in our VIP Jesus pass – not around, not over, but through – to beautiful transformation. To whom, after all, can we go? We have received the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that the Holy One of God. Amen.

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