

WHAT IN THE WORLD?

John 6: 24-35 August 9, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

In the cartoon, Pickles, the wife is reading to her husband. She exclaims, "What in the world? They are looking for erotic fish." The husband looks at the article and says, "It says they are looking for exotic fish." To which she replies, "Oh, okay." In her way of looking at the world and making sense of it, erotic fish just did not make any sense. They did not fit into her world. Exotic fish, yes, she knew about those. I remember the first time I ever saw a Volkswagen. I thought, "What in the world?" It seemed to be a car, and those fit in my world, but this thing, I didn't know about it. We make sense of the world by making things fit within the pattern of what we already know. A kid sees a strange thing and asks, "What is that?" You reply, "That is a hippopotamus." The kid persists, "What is that?" And you explain, "It is an animal." The kid replies, "I see." The kid knows what an animal is, so she can fit the Hippopotamus into her category of animals – it fits into the pattern of what is known to her. That is one way of making sense of the world.

How do you make sense of the world? What is it that causes you to stand on solid ground? We work at that more than we realize. This week I read in the paper that last year Tiger Woods made 148 million dollars. LeBron James made 40.5 million. For a 30 second superbowl ad, you would pay 3 million dollars. I read those statistics and I say, "What in the world?" That phrase comes to me when something seems to be so out of line that it couldn't be in the world I know. "What in the world? How can that be?" We see something strange, new, something out of the ordinary and what do we do? We try to explain it by what we know. That is how we make sense of the world.

In our text in John for today, the crowd is determined to not lose touch with Jesus. Jesus goes across the Sea of Galilee. The crowd gets in boats and goes across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus doesn't seem to be impressed with their numbers – a lesson the church needs to learn today. Many church communities today give the impression that popularity and packed pews are sufficient in themselves. Anything to get the people to come. Jesus told the crowd that they were interested in him because they might find in him one to ease material difficulties and maybe increase comfort in their lives. "You seek me only for the chance of loaves and fish." The by-products are important to the crowd, but the crowd is not interested in commitment, justice and reaching out to the poor. These spiritual gifts – peace, joy, love, patience – What are they good for? The crowd did not know what to do with them. For Jesus, the crowd seems to place value on the wrong things. His word from another setting, "Do not labor for food that perishes, but for food that leads to eternal life."

The crowd is having trouble making sense of Jesus. They are having trouble fitting him into their known world. Jesus, what are you talking about? They question him about how they can please God. "What must we do to be doing the work of God?" Jesus, how do we make sense of our life? What in the world are you talking about? Why are we here? What are we meant to do?"

PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

Do you remember the question in the catechism, “What is the chief end of Man?” Answer written right there in the catechism, “To glorify God and enjoy God forever.” YEAH!! What in the world? What does that mean? How do we do that?

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent. Always and everywhere, our beliefs color and shape our personality. What we believe about a person determines how we treat that person, how we act toward them. This week at Youthserve Urban Camp, we were discussing racism. If a person thinks someone of a different race is not really human, not as smart as his/her own race, then the person is treated in a way that degrades them. But if you think that people of all races are creatures of God, we are all in the same human family, that brings on another way of behavior. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God and to order life accordingly.

“Jesus, why should we believe you? you haven’t done anymore than Moses. He gave our fathers manna in the wilderness. So Jesus, what are you talking about?” Jesus answers, “It was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but it is God who gives you the bread from heaven. It is God who sent me into the world. “I am the bread of life.” The crowd is saying, “What in the world?” Bread to them means Merita or Wonder or Sara Lee. Jesus says “I am the living water” and they are thinking H2O. What in the world? For the Christian, religion is bound up in a relationship to Jesus. (Don’t take this part of my sermon to rule out Jews, Buddhist, Moslems, Hindus from God’s presence and care. I am not doing that.) I am saying for our tradition of coming into the presence of God that it is not a philosophy that relates us to God, but it is relationship with a life giving person. Jesus is telling the crowd that this God who sent Moses, who sends him is a necessary to us as our food.

“I am the bread of life.” I have come to bring you into the presence of God. Have you been around a person who is tired, hungry and just out of sorts with everyone and the world? That person needs to be refreshed. If that person can have a nice meal, then they can put aside the gloom and ill humor – and be himself/herself again. Food restores. Likewise, it is God who restores our life. There is this way of life, this way of looking at the world, this way of making sense of the world – that restores us and helps us be more than we can be.

When I think on the words of Jesus, “I am the Bread of Life,” I think of the words of a song.

You raise me up so I can stand on mountains,
You raise me up to walk on stormy seas,
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders,
You raise me up to more than I can be.

What in the world? How do we make sense of life? We fit it into a pattern we understand. As Christian, we understand ourselves as children of a good God. We understand ourselves as members of one another. We understand ourselves in our relationship with Jesus. And it is Jesus who teaches us a basic rule of making sense of our world. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. It is in this relationship to Jesus that we understand relationships among ourselves. It is how we make sense and relate to those about us. For in Jesus, we see God in the very life and being of those about us.

PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." He also said, "You are the light of the world." It makes sense to me that in Jesus, God gives us the Bread of Life – the basic gift of living in relationships with those about us in an ordered way. I believe others can make sense of the world as they see the spirit and love of God acted out in our own lives.

Do you understand? If you do, that is a miracle. It is a gift, a gift from heaven. It is the gift of God's grace among us.