

The 10th Sunday after Pentecost

August 13, 2006

The Bread of Life

Are You Hungry?

Deuteronomy 8:1-10:

1. **Deuteronomy: 5th book of the Pentateuch:**
 - a. *Meaning*: The word Deuteronomy means “2nd Law”.
 - b. *Authorship*: While its authorship is attributed to Moses, the book itself resulted when scattered pieces probably written by Moses or one of his scribes were discovered in the temple and then compiled into a book in 622 BC, this prompting the religious reform of Josiah.
 - c. *Purpose*: The book is seen as a sort of last will and testament of Moses, in which he explains how all the laws of the Jewish people relate back to the 10 Commandments. It is, therefore, so central that it is often called “the basic document of Judaism”.
 - d. *Theory of Retribution*: It is this book that also introduces very clearly the theory of retribution, that is, that every victory experienced by Joshua, the Judges and Kings are rewards for fidelity, whereas all the defeats are punishment for infidelity. Disobedience then leads to defeat.
 - e. *Reminders*: This book was so important that a *phylactery* (a small box containing verses from Deuteronomy) would be fastened to the arm and forehead as reminders of God’s love and law. Also, the *Mezuzah* (a small wooden, metal or glass case) was placed on the right doorpost of a house as a reminder of the presence and love of God.
2. **Historical Background:**
 - a. During the reign of Josiah of Judah (640-609 BC), the Assyrian empire was declining (625-612 BC). Josiah wished to reclaim some of lands lost to Assyria when the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered in 721 BC.
 - b. He gradually recaptured Bethel, Samaria and Megiddo.
 - c. Then in 622 BC, Hilkiah, a priest of the temple in Jerusalem, discovered the code for the laws as written in Deuteronomy. It had been held in Shechem, the legal center of Israel before its defeat in 721, and then moved to the temple and hidden.
 - d. This began a religious revival that all the more assisted in Josiah’s desire for a return to national pride. He repaired the temple at first, and then removed Assyrian religious symbols from the temple.
 - e. Thus, helpful to his effort was to reunify the lands in the worship of the one, true God, Yahweh.

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- f. Note: Josiah feared a resurgence of power from Assyria that never came, and so when the Egyptian army tried to assert their authority over Palestine, Josiah fought them and was killed at Megiddo in 609 BC.
3. **Today's Section:**
 - a. **About 1280 BC:** Talks of how the people were punished for fashioning the Gold Calf by being forced to wander in the desert for 40 years. Again, the theory of retribution: sin and be forced to wander.
 - b. **About 622 BC:** The message is written to the people who have already entered the promised land and have become rich. Hence, the subtle message is that their wealth is due to faithfulness in God. Become unfaithful, and you will lose it all.
 - c. **Love of God:** Of course, the other theme is God's love, so, once having punished his disobedient people, he now rewards them with a land of wheat, of milk and honey. Even in the desert, God fed the people with manna, so God never completely abandons the people, just punishes them.
 - d. **Manna:** is
 - i. a sweet, resinous substance exuded from a desert tree (tamarix manifera), as well as 2-3 desert shrubs.
 - ii. When an insect punctures the tree or shrub, manna comes out like frost, white and sweet. It can be kneaded like meal and made into cakes.
 - iii. However, it melts once the morning sun hits it, and so the Jews had to work hard and fast to collect, knead and eat the manna.
 - iv. It has been called "the grain of heaven" and "the bread of the Almighty".
 - v. A jar of manna was kept in the Ark of the Covenant.
 - vi. NOTE: Quail was also eaten, it being a migrating bird that flies from Egypt over Palestine in March, and is so heavy that it falls to the ground out of fatigue during the night when it mostly flies. Hence, to the people, food falling out of the sky was seen as a gift from God.

John 6:37-51: The Bread of Life

1. **Manna vs. The Bread of Life:** Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees, being asked what he can give the people in contrast to Moses who gave them manna in the desert. Jesus responds that those who ate manna eventually died, but those who eat the bread of life do not die. He is the bread of life, so that he who is in communion with him will live forever.
2. **Communion is Essential for Life:** In the Eucharist, bread becomes the body of Christ and wine his blood. To eat and drink thus is to become one with Christ, just as the food becomes one with your body. Hence, communion is not just a funny ceremony where you eat wafers of bread and sip wine, it is a powerful act to realize that union with God is life and disunion is death.
3. **Communion is Not Just More Life, but a Different Kind of Life:** But union and living forever is not the full or most important part of the message.

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- a. The Eucharist is an act of our thanking Jesus for dying for us on the cross, for loving us so much as to become a human being and then die for all of us, sinners as well as the virtuous.
- b. The Eucharist calls our faith to be translated into acts of love. The Eucharist is called the Agape, the Love Feast, hence implying not just more life, but the manner of life, namely, love.
- c. That is why Paul was mad at the Corinthians for having cliques during the Eucharist. If we are one with Christ, we are one with each other.
- d. The Body of Christ is made up of all people, and so prejudice and hatred are destructive of that unity and make no sense, any more than it makes sense for the right leg to hate the left leg, or the head to hate the heart.