

Proper 13, Year B
John 6: 24-35
August 2, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

In Times Like These:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

When I returned to church after a long absence, I found myself clinging to every word. Even though it was almost fifteen years ago, I still remember a lot of what I heard. I remember one priest talking about cutting up his 76 card as an act of solidarity, another one empathizing with Martha thus making me feel a whole lot better about myself, and another comparing a leap of faith to sky-diving. But the phrase that sticks in my mind was one that a church member said time and again when talking about his faith. He kept saying, “It’s simple really—just believe. That’s all Jesus asks of us. Just believe.”

At the time, I wondered to myself, “Is it really that simple? How do people ‘just believe’? Sky-diving would be a whole lot easier.”

And yet isn’t that just what Jesus is saying to those who followed him to the distant shore? Remember what he says to those who ask him, “What must we **do** to perform the works of God?” He says, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” It’s simple really—just believe.

If belief is simply a matter of assenting to a series of propositions, then, yes—it’s simple.

But to Jesus and to those who follow him belief is so much more than simply accepting a series of statements about Jesus and about God.

To Jesus, and to those who choose to follow him, belief is not a one-time-only thing. It’s an on-going process—more a believing into than a belief in. A verb not a noun.

To Jesus, and to those who choose to follow him, belief is a matter of commitment, loyalty and solidarity. I hear him saying “Stick with me.”

“Stick with me when you’re hungry or afraid.”

“Stick with me when you’re unclear about what to do.”

“Stick with me when the going gets tough.”

“Stick with me.” “Believe in me.” Good advice, but hardly simple.

Think about what sticking with Jesus—believing in Jesus—entails.

Hanging out not with the rich and powerful but with the neediest and the lowliest

Reaching out and touching those others overlook

Searching for and seeing the face of God in the person facing you

Forgiving not once or twice but seventy times seven times
Extending the healing hand whenever you can
Not easy. Hardly simple.

You and I, we live in a time of competing messages, powerful forces pulling us in one direction or another—demands on our time, demands on our energy, demands on our loyalty. We are bombarded by contradictory messages and conflicting demands. It can suck the very life out of you.

Where do we find life in times such as these?

We turn to the bread of life—a bread that nourishes, a bread that sustains, a bread that fulfills our deepest needs. It's simple really—we turn to Jesus who offers us the bread of life.

How do we live in times such as these?

By living the gospel—nourished by the bread of life
Reaching out and touching those others overlook
Searching for and seeing the face of God in the person facing us
Extending the healing hand whenever we can
Following Jesus as best we can

Over a hundred years ago, a busy mother wrote these words:

I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord;
no tender voice like thine can peace afford.
I need thee, O I need thee;
every hour I need thee;
O bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.

Fitting don't you think for times like these?