

Karen Hollis – sermon
John 6:35, 41-51
August 12, 2018

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Most of you know that during various seasons of my adult life I've spent time learning about shamanism. For me, shamanism is a practice of connecting with and learning from God, God's created world, and our great cloud of witnesses for the purpose of living a full life of gratitude and service to others.

During one of these seasons I gathered with some friends for a weekend near Mt. Rainier. We were all part of a mentor group that centered around the practice of shamanism. We were sitting in a circle, preparing a medicine bundle. I don't claim to understand the full expression of the medicine bundle in first nations cultures, but we did it in the context of an offering to God in thanksgiving for the goodness God offers to us and to the world. In a way it was also an offering in support of what God does. So we gathered in a circle. One person laid out a cloth

to collect all the items, and the people took turns putting things on the cloth in offering. I don't remember all of the items offered, but certainly sage and sweet grass, herbs that are used for cleansing and bringing prayers to God. Perhaps people offered seeds or feathers, stones or symbols. Someone might put in something of personal significance like a memento or a picture. Anything those gathered discern to be fitting for the occasion. At the end, the contents are wrapped up in the cloth and tied with a string. When it's ready, the bundle is then burned in a fire. But the offering part of the process goes on for maybe 20 minutes as people discern and put things on the cloth . . . the person sitting behind the cloth asks every few minutes, "what else?" What do you have to offer? On this occasion someone offered a bar of chocolate, "for sweetness," she said. She handed it to the person sitting behind the cloth to add to the bundle. He took the bar of chocolate and paused. He looked at it, then he broke it and passed it to the left and the right, around the circle. After each of us had taken a small piece, the remainder came back to the

bundle for the offering. Now, the person who broke the chocolate knew what he was doing; I knew at the time he had been ordained in the United Methodist Church 30 years before; though he had long since left the church, God was still expressing the truth of Christ through him.

I was in seminary at the time and was absolutely floored, because once again I was having an experience outside my tradition that was teaching me about my tradition. It taught me what 25 years in the church hadn't taught me. (walk to table) We offer our gifts to God at the table. We offer bread, juice, water and wine. We offer our money, the fruit of our labour. We commit our lives to service of Christ with a prayer that God will transform all of it, not just the bread and wine, but all of it in service of God's kingdom. We receive here what God gifts back to us so that we will remember our oneness in Christ and our place in God's kingdom.

The table is about both giving and receiving.

Jesus pours out his heart through this discourse as he tries to convey what he is giving. He has an enormous message with imperfect words that people react to (bread of heaven? Who does he think he is, don't we know his parents?). But he assures them if they're here, even if they are arguing with him, God has drawn them there first.

First, God gives an invitation. Jesus phrases it in kind of a negative way, "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me," probably because he's responding to hecklers. But the message he's conveying is that God wants to be in relationship with us. God initiates relationship with us. All of the inquiring, searching, longing to be fed by God is a response to God's initiating presence in our lives.

God begins with a gift that is an invitation . . . to give our lives to Christ.

The power of what Jesus offers is unlocked when we are broken open,

acknowledging our need for Christ, and believing he can transform our brokenness and our pain. Whenever Jesus performs healings, he says, “your faith has healed you.” For him believing is key to receiving the transformation he offers. If we don’t give ourselves over to something, how can it have power in our lives? When we lend ourselves to good habits and practices or lend ourselves to negative ones, they have power in our lives. The thoughts we believe have power in our lives – if we don’t believe a thought, it has no power with us. For Jesus, believing is the key to receiving the transformation he offers.

At the centre of this giving and receiving is Jesus, because Jesus is the Word of God, who was with God in the beginning. He is the Word who created with God, and everything in the world came into being through him. He loves creation and is already invested in our well-being. Jesus, the Word who became flesh, came to live among us, to know our human experience and offer himself for the sake of the world.¹ Jesus is the centre of this giving and

¹ John 1

receiving because he acts as a bridge between the physical world we can touch, see and smell, and the Mystery who is our Creator.

And so Jesus says come. “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”² Come and give as you receive.

At the table of Christ we remember what Jesus did and the role he has in our lives when we open up to him. He is the sustenance for this one body. He gives all he is for the sake of our lives; we offer our lives to his service in response because we have faith that he is what we need. And you know what he does with our lives . . . he blesses them, he transforms them in love and gives them right back to us as a gift. Go, live in me, and I will live in you. I am the bread of life.

In response to this message from Jesus, we are invited to sing this beautiful song together. This song helps me own my need for God and feel the gratitude for that relationship. Let’s take a breath and sing together.

² John 6:35