

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Then all hell breaks loose. "Hey, I know his parents and his brothers and sisters. I changed his diapers. He's just like all the other kids from the neighborhood. He certainly can't be the one God sent for redemption."

The crowd is offended by Jesus' suggestion that he, a person just as they are, is the answer to their deepest longings and greatest needs.

Think of the audacious claim that Jesus is making. Who ever heard of a God having anything to do with the everyday and the ordinary? Gods are made for greatness; they reside in the clouds or distant mountain, not down here with the likes of us. Who ever heard of a God who is willing to suffer the indecencies and embarrassments of human life? It's laughable. So the crowd grumbles.

They know their own flaws and shortcomings, their faithlessness and failures. They know their doubts and fears, betrayals and broken promises, petty grudges and foolish prejudices. If Jesus is really like they are, then they are doomed. How can someone who is like them save? So they grumble because they are angry, and even more because they are afraid, afraid that, in the end, they're really not worth saving.

Are we all that different? I'm not. Surely, you could find a better preacher, a more effective pastor. And yet, we are bold enough to believe that God uses ordinary things to achieve God's will and to bring to the world God's salvation.

How can this be? Because of this very person, Jesus, who was ordinary, mortal like you and me, and who was also uncommon and divine. This is the claim Jesus makes which offended the crowd who followed him then. It is also the claim which offends any who take it seriously today. Where we expect God to come in might, God comes in weakness; where we look for God to come in power, God comes in vulnerability; and when we seek God in justice and righteousness – which is, after all, what we all expect from a God – we find God (or rather are found by God!) in forgiveness and mercy. This is the claim Jesus makes: God became incarnate; he became like us, so that God might save us and all people who come to faith!

God does not despise the common but seeks the ordinary to achieve God's will: this is the promise that rests behind the sacraments. God uses water, bread, or wine, ordinary things to communicate that he will not despise or abandon us, we who are just ordinary people. In the sacraments, we find God's promise to take hold of us and make us God's own, to remain with us and to never let us go.

We also find another promise which God makes to us through the sacraments. It is the promise not only to redeem us, but also to use us – to make use of our skills and talents, inadequate though they may seem, to continue God's work of creating, redeeming, and sustaining all that is. This too is an incredible promise!

Over the years, I've prayed with numerous people in hospital. I often give God thanks for the machines and instruments to which they or their loved one is attached, for the people who keep the hospital clean as well as for the nurses and doctors who attend to them. I wonder, at times, if they find that inappropriate or just plain odd?

I find it surprising that God would work through technology and instruments (even a new AV system), through bottom-line corporations and imperfect labor unions, through human doctors and nurses with short tempers or poor bed-side manners. I find it amazing that God works through flawed clergy, jaded teachers, worn-out secretaries, over-worked government officials, exhausted parents – that God would choose these and so many other unlikely candidates through whom to work, even when they don't suspect it.

This promise, too, we find in the sacraments. God uses ordinary bread and wine to bring to us God's saving presence and God uses each of us to accomplish God's will and work in God's world.

It can be hard at times to see God at work through our technology, our labors, and our lives. And for this reason, God gives us the sacraments. At the font, at the altar, God speaks to us most clearly: God's promise of forgiveness and acceptance, of wholeness and life, is given to us in a form in which we not only can hear, but also can see, taste, touch, and feel. The sacraments invite us to raise our eyes from the confusion and ambiguity of life for a moment, so that we may receive God's audacious promises and return to our lives in this stressful and confusing world with courage and hope.

So come: come each week to hear God's word proclaimed in liturgy and hymns, the Scripture read and sermons preached. Come to receive God's sacraments and to be touched by God's presence. Come with your hearts and minds, with hands and mouths and bodies, to receive the incarnate God, the God who takes physical form for us. Come and bring all your ordinary skills and extraordinary hopes and fears. Come receive God's promise to use all that you have and are for God's glory.

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