

SERMON- Proper 13 (B)

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Exodus 16:2-4,9-15

~~Psalm 78:23-29~~

Good Shepherd

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John 6:24-35

OPENING:

I'm always been fascinated by the parts of our church service, the stuff that we do here every week, that we say and perform "religiously," that: if you were saying those words for the first time, or were to really think about them, you would wonder why you say them or what they are supposed to mean.

An example of this is from the Lord's Prayer, and how we start it, when we say: "We are bold to say..."¹

Why "bold" to say/pray? Jesus told us to pray this prayer specifically, so we should be covered...

Why "bold" to pray? We are all saying it all together, it's the one prayer that most of us have memorized...

BOLD

Speaking of "bold", it takes some chutzpah to complain as the Israelites do in our Old Testament Lesson, as their descendants also do in our Gospel reading.

They were "bold" in a sense, bold to say what they were really thinking, bold to reveal what they were really feeling. They were honest, even if it's not very flattering.

We would rather not be connected with their ingratitude, their thickheadedness, the sheer rudeness of these crowds, but it's sort of built in to our liturgy every week. Without fail, we are "bold to say" as we start the Lord's Prayer and even more so when we say "Give us today our daily bread"—we continue that relationship with God by being a little desperate and a little needy. Do you hear a child's "gimme" in there?"

I realize that words can play tricks and mean different things.

"Bold" can mean "courageous" as in "to boldly go where no man has gone before."
(*Star Trek*)

Or "Bold" can mean "impudent" and "impulsive", as in the soap opera "The Bold and the Beautiful."

¹ *Book of Common Prayer*, pgs. 336, 363.

Now I checked, the word “bold” has been in the opening to the Lord’s Prayer for centuries, and the author probably meant it, originally, in the antiquated sense of the word as merely “confident” or “assured.”²

But, I still think it’s important to ask... how do *you* understand that phrase in our prayer book?

ANSWERS:

As you are pondering, know that you might not want to answer that type of question too completely, because it takes something out of the faith journey, setting up a pattern where if one can intellectually swallow and understand something entirely, something so important as how we relate to God, then it gives you a false sense of closure.

Think about it, in the Old Testament story, the complaining Israelites amidst their hunger find sustenance in something they call *manna* in Hebrew, which means literally “What is it?” That’s the joke, the great cosmic laugh is that God provides them something that has no name.

The answer to their prayers, the thing that saved them, the celestial Wonder bread™, the soul food from the sky, is literally a gigantic question mark.

Likewise when God revealed Godself to Moses in the Burning Bush, it was with a similar strange name *YHWH*: “I am what I am.”

And Jesus is no better, answering questions with questions, and with parables. In our Gospel passage especially, Jesus confounds and mystifies, for better or for worse, as Jesus, is willing to “risk ambiguity, metaphor and miscommunication.”

Why? Maybe because we are supposed to reciprocate in some way.

That’s where the boldness comes in, we have to be comfortable with that uncomfortableness and then have the courage to maintain that relationship, to kvetch, and complain and pray boldly about it.

Of course, the temptation for the preacher is to say:

“Well, Jesus was not as skilled a communicator as I am” this is what he really meant.³

² [“We Are Bold to Say”: The Blessed Audaciousness of the Lord’s Prayer | The Tides of God \(wordpress.com\)](#)

³ Willimon, William. “Homiletical Perspective” in 2009. *Feasting on the Word* (Year B, Volume 3) Barbara Brown Taylor and David L. Bartlett, eds. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 311

I know what he *really* meant when he said: “I am the Bread of Life.”

In Medieval times, artists would fall into this trap, when painting the scene of the Manna falling from the sky. They would depict the manna as perfectly circular white pieces of bread—communion wafers—dropping into people’s mouths. That makes it pretty obvious, pretty clear. Manna= bread of Life= Jesus.⁴

Maybe you gain a little something in the comprehension, but you lose the possibility of exploring the larger idea.

INTERPRETATION

Instead, we are “bold to say”; Roman Catholics have it as “we dare to say”⁵... We approach God with some degree of uncertainty and doubt, but willing to risk something in this relationship, not precisely sure what is on the other side, and honest enough to say that it might be simply misplaced confidence that is generating our walk with God.

One bold interpretation of this passage is that the relationship between God and the wandering Israelites is like that of between parents and a new born.

Think about it:

they have only known each other for a few weeks, they are finally free, the baby has born, birthed in the amazing Exodus from Egypt, through the birth canal of the miracle at the Red Sea. Everything is wonderful until....

They realize that no one knows what they are doing.

All the dreams have come true with this new life but....

can they really trust one another, when times get tough?

So, some bold mutual testing goes on in the wilderness of this relationship.

In other words, the baby is crying, will the parent come and will they know what to do when they get there?⁶

An even bolder interpretation could describe the relationship between God and the Israelites in Exodus as two persons who are on their honeymoon.

They don’t really know each other, they entered into this new union with great fanfare, leaving Egypt, setting off for a lifetime of adventure.

Everything is supposed to be perfect, hunky-dory, magical.

⁴ Ramshaw, Gail. 2009. “Living by the Word” *The Christian Century* 126 (15): 20.

For examples of images, see: www.themorgan.org/collection/crusader-bible/18;

⁵ [New Roman Missal - Order of Mass \(liturgies.net\)](http://www.liturgies.net)

⁶ McDonald, Dean. “Homiletical Perspective” in *Feasting on the Word*, (Year B, Volume 3) Barbara Brown Taylor and David L. Bartlett, eds. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 295.

But then they have their first fight, and it's over food.

COMPLAINING:

It's interesting, in the Old Testament, the famous line that gets repeated often is “no one can see God's face and live.” That's because it would be too much for a human being to bear, to see God's face.

That having been said, humans seem to be able to complain, a lot, and get away with it. In fact, when it's done in worship, it's given a name, Lament, and it's elevated into a ritualistic art form.⁷

Would *we* be so bold as to follow in our ancestors' footsteps and approach God with our true selves, with our brokenness and humanity, our bold neediness?

CONCLUSION:

The word that comes to mind is “reliant.” In our culture, “reliant” is almost a slur, a bad word. “Dependent”—is another word in that negative vein, a word we use when we are filling out our taxes.

So we teach our children in schools and in our homes to be *independent*, to be *self-reliant*.

But, with God, something else entirely is described, a different type of relationship, God calls us on to be “bold” and to depend on God, by asking for bread, and proclaiming “Our Father....”

With God, it seems that we need to be “reliant”

For us, when we pray “we are bold to say”, it has counter-cultural implications.

Saying that we need God, we need bread on this daily and forevermore.

Saying that we don't where we are going to get it from.

Revealing that we know we are going to mess up.

But, still imploring God, we say: “let's eat.”⁸

Let's share this meal.

The Israelites said boldly “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Likewise we pray... boldly: “Give us today our Daily Bread” AND “Thy will be done.” **AMEN**

⁷ Exodus 33.20, Judges 13.22, Isaiah 6.5; Craddock, Fred B. 1992. *Preaching through the Christian Year (Year B)*. Philadelphia: Trinity, 363.

⁸ Willimon, 313.