

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

August 23, 2009
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Psalm 84:1-12

1How lovely is your dwelling place,
 O LORD of hosts!

2My soul longs, indeed it faints
 for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
 to the living God.

3Even the sparrow finds a home,
 and the swallow a nest for herself,
 where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
 my King and my God.

4Happy are those who live in your house,
 ever singing your praise.
Selah

5Happy are those whose strength is in you,
 in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

6As they go through the valley of Baca
 they make it a place of springs;
 the early rain also covers it with pools.

7They go from strength to strength;
 the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

8O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
 give ear, O God of Jacob!
Selah

9Behold our shield, O God;
 look on the face of your anointed.

10For a day in your courts is better
 than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
 than live in the tents of wickedness.

11For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
 he bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does the LORD withhold

from those who walk uprightly.
12O LORD of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.

John 6:56-69

56"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." 59He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

60When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" 61But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? 62Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. 65And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

66Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. 67So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" 68Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

"Community Clothing"

In the back classroom there used to be this large plastic tub filled with clothes, purses, and even a few pairs of shoes. The tub was filled with cast off and far out clothing that kids could use to play dress up. I find the selections that children make when playing dress up rather fascinating.

It is fun to watch the kids put on those crazy outfits and prance around as if they were on the red carpet. You can just tell that they have a good time doing it. Girls and boys alike. They will swap the outfits back and forth and switch out the handbags and pearls. It is a good time.

What stands out to me is that “dress up” is an activity that the children always do in community. One never sees a child playing dress up on their own. It is always done by a group of children so that they can comment on the outfits, swap things back and forth, and play pretend games depending on the outfit that they are in.

I believe in free play and love it when children let their imaginations run wild and they go from four year olds to account executives. They go from just kids trying on outfits to kids who imagine that they are families with moms, dads, and children alike.

It is a community game.

It is a community game. One cannot really play the game by oneself. It can only be played with other children. Sure, a single child could try on different outfits, but to really make it work there needs to be other children trying on wacky clothes too. Then in community there is that spark of imagination that breaks out when they start to paint the scene of who they are as they imagine a new world.

Some people are introverts and some people are extroverts. You can spend 100 dollars an hour and meet with a therapist who will help you to identify if you are an extrovert or an introvert. Or you can use this basic little rule of thumb. Do you get your energy from being around other people? Do you find being in crowd of a people an exhilarating thing and you just cannot wait to meet new friends? If so, you are an extrovert.

Are you the kind of person who when thrown into the group of people would rather be off by yourself? Or do you find that after you have had some extended encounter with a group of others you need some

alone time to recover? If you need that alone time to recover, it probably means that being with other people expends more energy than it gives you and you are an introvert.

I had this wonderful funny friend who went on a cruise only to find out when she boarded the ship that there were 830 other passengers on the ship. She obtained a list of who was on the ship and was bound and determined that by the end of the 7 days she would have met all of them. She checked off their names from her list as she met them. A clear extrovert—indeed, she was off the charts and maybe even a bit off her rocker, as might be said.

It does not matter if you are an outgoing sort who is the life of the party, or the quiet reflective type who needs your silent spaces. Both types of people are wonderful and the true expression of the diversity with which God has made us.

It is not better to be one type or the other. And if you are one type you should not be wishing you were the other—you are who you are, and you should embrace the beauty of who you are.

For certain—I'm all about that—that we come to see that each of us is a reflection of the image of God and that all of us bear the imprint of the holy within us. That is something to be embraced and claimed. We all need to make that claim over our lives and hear the claim that flows from our baptism—even those words Jesus heard upon his own baptism—"You are mine." We are the beloved sons and daughters of God.

For many his words sounded more like some odd cannibalism than they did a gracious invitation. It was strange to hear him say it and put it

the way he did. Here was this Jesus, the very one who had not only come walking on the water, but the one who had fed those five thousand folks with those few fish and bread.

Now he was saying this somewhat outlandish thing. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.” It just did not quiet sit right for some of them—“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.”

It does not matter if we are extroverts or introverts. We are wonderfully made. You cannot play dress up by yourself. It is a game played in community. We live in community.

Why? What happens? It is the encounter, the convening, and the coming together. How does Jesus put it? It is that word “abide.”

What happens? It is the abiding—the stop your breath millisecond moment when you see someone else and when they see you...it is that moment that makes us community.

I was buying my groceries the other day. There I was in the line. And so often one can be in that line and not really make any connections at all. You know we live in the kind of world where we can just say that plastic is fine, fork over our money and keep on moving.

But there was something about it the other day. It was more than that. Sure she asked me the question. “Paper or plastic?” “Plastic is good by me,” I responded. And then, then it happened. We talked about nothing in particular but we talked. I cannot even remember what the conversation, that lasted at most two minutes, was even about, but we talked and there was that millisecond moment there when she was not

just the grocery clerk but someone who in that moment I was connected to.

I could, if you will, see her. I encountered her. She encountered me. Not in some alien extra terrestrial sort of way—but in that way where each of us got to glimpse a little into the soul of another in order to see also ourselves.

I do not remember her name. I cannot pick her out in a line-up. I remember the encounter because of that coming together of our persons that happened there in that encounter, even if it was a brief encounter.

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Jesus says, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

It is about that abiding piece. That is the point. The abiding. The being connected. The encounter.

It is not an extrovert or an introvert thing. It is about our being connected with each other. That is what this meal is about. It is about a connection with each other and with God. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

That connection is not just about being hooked together—connection is more than that. Connection is about the reality that we cannot see and know who we are until we encounter and abide in the other. It is in this abiding in Christ that we come to see who we really are. It is in this encountering the holiness of God that we come to an authentic vision of who we are as a people and as a person.

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It happens in community. When we dress ourselves with that connection, that encounter, that coming into the space of another—that is when we see ourselves. As such it is so significant that we not expect that everyone else will think like we do, act like we do, or conform to our view of how they should be or act. It is in that diversity that we come to know the complexity of who we really are.

The diverse God does not expect a homogenous people. God loves our diversity and gives it to us as a gift.

I don't know if you saw it this week. It was a story about a fire in an apartment building in either Essex or Middle River. As the story goes, this man fell asleep with a candle burning and the candle caught fire. He tried to put the fire out but was unable to do that. The whole building went up.

The man was on television. He admitted to what had happened. He was apologizing to his neighbors and taking responsibility. He was honest that it was his fault and said, "I'm sorry," and he meant it.

It was, I believe, an expression of community. It was not only his actions, but him—he was connected to his neighbors and he was authentically sorry for what had happened.

I wonder; I do wonder. I wonder what happened. Did they hear his apology? Did they accept the authenticity with which he was reaching out to them? Did they abide with each other?

Did they have community with each other? Or did they walk away in anger?

It is the community question. Do we hold with each other? Do we dress ourselves with the clothing of seeing each other in different ways and see that as a spark to our imagination or do we see it as a threat to move us out of our comfort zone?

Community is not a test. It is not a threat. It is not a noun, but a verb—and maybe in its truest sense is beyond language. Community is an opportunity.

Jesus invited them into community. In fact, this point in the gospel of John is the first point where the disciples are referred to as “the twelve.” It is after some have gone, and Jesus asks them do you want to stay or go.

That community comes together—it forms. And Peter says, “Oh Lord, where else could we go, you have the words of eternal life.” He gets it that it is a good thing to be there. He abides.

He abides...

Jesus said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

“...and I in them.” That is the place—that in this spark, in this encounter, in this connection, in this community in that millisecond moment there is that place where there is more than connection, more than encounter. There is that place where there is God. ...if we will but “taste and see that that the Lord is good.” Amen.