

Pastor Troy E. Medlin  
11 Pentecost, Year B  
Grace, River Forest  
8/4/2024

*The Broken Sign of Life Himself*

We are beginning to know the drive between Illinois and Saskatchewan really well. We have traversed those roads many times. There are signs all along our path that communicate to us that we are headed in the right direction. The driftless area, the rolling hills of Otter tail county, the mounds outside of Minot all point us towards our destination. Our bodies long for those signs, no matter how many times we have encountered them. After all, they are the same but we are always different. There is a gift in their familiarity even as they greet us and spur us forward.

On a long journey there are other signs that take on extra significance if you are hungry. Sometimes you have to wait longer than your appetite would like- but eventually you will be guided to those outposts of nourishment. It could be A&W, Subway, or something else, but the results are the same. You are refueled for the hours and miles ahead. Filled up we can keep going. One of the inconveniences of life on earth though, is that no matter how much you eat or how nutritious your meal- you will have to stop again. Signs of hunger will become more apparent- irritability, stomach pangs, lack of energy, and the search goes on for the next meal.

This basic human need is important. That is why I'm sure the disciples were perplexed, intrigued, and a little confused when Jesus told them, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Jesus knows the way the body works. The miraculous lunch of bread and fish was filling, but even after that gathering on the seashore, they were ready to eat again. They *needed* to eat again and Jesus could provide for them. Like us- they do not quite understand yet what Jesus is getting at. That fourth sign in John's gospel was pointing towards something, or someone that will become obvious. Watch for the signs.

We work for the food that perishes, if you can call it work. The world offers it to us so consistently. The signs that dot the landscape lure us to counters aplenty. We know this food. It promises happiness, success, and fulfillment yet always leaves us wanting. Following those signs lead us only to dead ends and back again. Work and productivity itself is what so many of us think will satisfy. For me, it is the idea that I always have to be accomplishing something, and believing I am more enlightened than others that I think will fill me. We eat at the table of self-righteousness, and judgment- and if we are honest, we are still hungry. This food- like the signs that lure us lead us inward. Lost and alone. We know the contours of those signs and their destinations. Whatever you would label as the *food that perishes* the results are the same: endless striving. Exhausting. Empty.

We ask Jesus, “what sign will you give us?” He points to the provision of Manna, and then to his own flesh. The carpenter's son from Nazareth is the bread of heaven.

The signs are all around us. You've followed them here. Sunday School teachers, friends, parents, grandparents, friends, and strangers have guided you here. Around word, water, table and each other we see the crucified one broken open for us. In his vulnerability we see God's-self fully revealed. Sign and salvation- always for you. Destination- home in his body. In each stage of our lives he greets us with grace aplenty. Dependable.

Christ- the bread of life- is the one who gives himself to each one of us fully and completely. Apart from any work, earning or deserving- qualifications or not. He is yours. At this table you receive nothing less than his body and blood, the fulness of Jesus Christ every time. God withholds nothing from hungry sinners like you and me. God never fails to fill us with all that God could ever give. Christ fills all things so he might fill you. This bread brings life on the other side of every dead end. Pure gift. Promise personified- reaching all the way down to your deepest longing.

Luther said “I will give myself as Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me, I will do nothing in this life except what is profitable for my neighbor since I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.” In the satiety biology of the gospel we experience the gift of this bread in our bodies when we lose our lives for others and give it away. Signs that point beyond ourselves.

I had first heard of Ian Cron through his books around 2011. Something about how he talked about God resonated. He pointed beyond himself to the one that is always there even when we try our best to lose them. I was lost and hungry. I didn't know what I believed anymore. My faith journey had taken so many unexpected turns I didn't recognize my surroundings. I walked around in a daze of sadness and confusion. I wanted to believe but I didn't know how. Thanks to Ian, I knew where the bread was. I would stumble into a dimly lit sanctuary, starving for anything at all, surrounded by quiet strangers and take God into my body and know I was filled even when everything around me seemed vacuous.

Who has reminded you where the bread is? Who has been a sign for you, saying, “join me around the table?” We guide each other throughout our lives. We are always broken signs, beggars, hungry, and always found in the embrace of the God who is nothing short of bread. The God of all creation is right here. The God of broken pieces, staple food, frayed edges, stuff of the earth, crosses and empty graves, placed in your hand, who never lets you go.

“sir, give us this bread always.” He will.

