

“Finding Acceptance and a Purpose” based on Psalm 34, 1 Kings 19:4-8 and John 6:35, 41-51

Delivered on August 8, 2021 by Ruling Elder David R. Watts

It is difficult, in today's world, to find acceptance. Whenever we do something, even if it is the right thing, we are questioned about our motives. We are asked, “Did we do it for the right reasons?” instead of looking at the results. Acceptance is defined as “the action of consenting to receive or undertake something offered, or the action or process of being received as adequate or suitable, (often to be admitted into a group).” When we accept something, we agree to move something forward in an adequate, or suitable manor ... it does not imply perfection, or to be superior to other things offered. It says doing your best should be okay. When we offer to take an action, with the right intention, that should be enough. It should not need or merit judgement. We should find acceptance of what we do. But in today's world we often, avoid doing things because we expect judgement, instead of acceptance of the results. Who wants to be yelled at for trying? That often defeats the purpose. That often makes us decide if we even try to move forward. Judgement, by others, often causes us to decide if we will offer or try anything a second time.

The reading from Kings is the story of Elijah, Elisha's mentor. Elijah has ended a drought and defeated the prophets of Baal, as God's fiery champion. Now we find him running for his life from Beer-sheba, for proving God's worth or superiority over a false God. He is feeling lost and abandoned for doing the right thing. He has given up, lost his will to live, ready to throw in the towel and let anyone else do God's bidding. But even in his misery, he turns to God in prayer, asking God to take his life. But God has a different plan, one that involves Elijah training the person who will replace him (Elisha). He is asked to continue to move forward, to act and continue doing God's will. He may feel lost, but God has found him. He may feel unneeded or unwanted, but God feeds him and gives him the purpose he needs to exist. (Even though he must walk for forty days to find it.) Could we do as much, or do we need an answer in 40 seconds? Would we allow God the time to show us the way, even if it took years to understand God's purpose? God demonstrates that some battles are not won by power, earthquakes, fire or wind. Sometimes it takes the ministry of angels or a small gentle voice or nudge in the desired direction.

During the reading from John, we are forced to admit that we like to hold our God high, almighty and lifted up, mostly distant and exclusively in heaven. We believe that Religion needs to be spiritual, not uncomfortably reachable. When we are searching for a God, we do not want or expect to find that presence in the flesh. The Jews were offered the bread on which to live, but they were unwilling to accept it. Would we, if we were in the same situation? Elijah demonstrated strength when he cried out to his Lord. He knew God was someone who would listen and ... listening in return, he allowed himself to be cared for. He had to pause, and let go of his fear, before he could embrace the next transition in his life. The Jews in John's Gospel needed to do the same, beginning with listening to the quiet voice of reason in their lives. William Willimon reminds us that in order to comprehend Jesus, to come to Jesus, to see who He is and what He means, we must accept divine revelation as a gift. This gift will not come

because of our efforts, or because we make it happen. Jesus says in the fourth gospel, “The Spirit blows where it chooses” (John 3:8). Revelation is not containable, controlled by us, programmed or predictable. We are asked and expected to close the gap between God’s behavior and our own. We are not expected to just love God, worship God and thank God. We are expected to imitate Jesus, thereby bringing us closer to God.

God’s presence can be expressed and powerfully captured in an angel, like the one who gently nudges Elijah to get up, drink water and eat bread. Responses can be made in acts of kindness, if we are willing to recognize them. Grief and exhaustion can be strengthened by acts of compassion and care. Although Elijah felt alone, God never left him. We often see “agents of God” in some form, step in at critical moments so we can take the next step in our journeys. Sometimes they are just reaching out a hand, or lifeline, so we can move forward. Have faith and accept that God will provide a purpose and order in our lives. In our call to worship, Psalm 34 said; “I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.” We need to seek God and accept His help in return. The acts of Jesus, in John’s gospel, are more than miracles, designed to benefit individuals, they are meant to point the way to Jesus, convince the Jews and us to believe and accept Jesus. They speak of hunger and nourishment, bread and flesh, wine and blood, the basic needs of human survival. The more we struggle to recognize how God is answering our prayers, or if and when He answers, the more likely we will be to miss his quiet voice altogether. It can be as simple as a delay at an intersection or meeting an old friend in the Acme. If we look too hard for miracles, we may miss them. God does speak, we need to listen, quietly and with Faith that He knows what He is doing. In my life and in yours, He has already proven it over and over again. Recognize it. Have Faith. Accept small gifts and blessings, they are sent your way every day.

Our lectionary spends five weeks on this gospel of John speaking of Jesus as the “Bread of Life”, naming it as the means of true life with us abiding in God. We are asked to establish a Christian belief and a sacramental practice. In John 6, the people are angry at Jesus, not for his miracles, but for claiming divine identity and purpose. They ask, “How can he say ‘I have come down from heaven, when we know he is human?’” Instead of fear they should have been showing reverence and worship, if they had listened and understood what He was saying. Jesus is leading the people to a new life through belief in his name. In Isaiah 54:13 we hear “All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your children.” We are asked to look past earthliness and believe in where the signs are pointing, His Divinity. We are called to a deeper commitment. We are led to acceptance and even we are given a purpose in life. The gospel says, “I am the bread of life, all who follow Me will have eternal life” with Jesus as the very presence of God. We are asked to commit ourselves to Him, body and soul, in union with the God who created us. To do so is to gain eternal life, Jesus said, “eat and never die”. Through acceptance, we find our purpose, without judgement, without perfection, and without superiority. It is time to accept and move forward, after all, even sinners are welcome.

May the Grace and Peace of the Lord and the Holy Spirit be with you always, today and every day. Amen.

Word Search Puzzle

from WhenWeWordSearch.com (use for free distribution only)
words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

John 6:35, 41-51 (NLT) Jesus ***replied***, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be ***hungry*** again. Whoever believes in me will never be ***thirsty***. Then the ***people began*** to ***murmur*** in ***disagreement*** because he had said, "I am the ***bread*** that came down from heaven." They said, "Isn't this ***Jesus***, the ***son*** of ***Joseph***? We know his father and ***mother***. How can he say, 'I came down from heaven'?" But Jesus replied, "***Stop complaining*** about what I said. For no one can come to me unless the ***Father*** who sent me ***draws*** them to me, and at the last ***day*** I will ***raise*** them up. As it is ***written*** in the ***Scriptures***, 'They will all be ***taught*** by God.' Everyone who ***listens*** to the Father and ***learns*** from him comes to me. (Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I, who was sent from ***God***, have seen him.) "I tell you the ***truth***, anyone who believes has ***eternal*** life. Yes, I am the bread of ***life***! Your ***ancestors ate manna*** in the ***wilderness***, but they all died. Anyone who ***eats*** the bread from heaven, however, will never ***die***. I am the ***living*** bread that came down from ***heaven***. Anyone who eats this bread will live ***forever***; and this bread, which I will ***offer*** so the ***world*** may live, is my ***flesh***."