

Date: Sunday, August 13, 2006
Text: John 6: 35, 41-51 (Pentecost 10)
Preacher: Rev. Sheldon Gattinger
Location: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford, SK.
sheldon.gattinger@gmail.com

Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

“Then they [The Jews/Pharisees] were saying, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (John 6:42)

I would like to tell you a story. This story is about a young first-year seminary student named Stanley. Now like most seminarians, Stanley was truly enjoying his first year of seminary and the challenges that it brought. Within weeks new horizons of insight and knowledge – not to mention faith – could be comprehended in the distance. Granted, it would be a long journey for Stanley to embark upon but he was looking forward to it. After all, this was his faith as well as his calling.

But something happened to Stanley rather early on upon his journey. I suppose it all started off innocent enough. But the outcome was tragic.

You see, Stanley was at home one night, already into his second semester of studies, sitting in his easy chair, diligently reading a textbook. Just then, Stanley’s quiet night was interrupted by the ringing of a telephone. Stanley put his book down and answered the phone. Much to Stanley’s surprise, on the other end of the telephone was his home congregation’s pastor.

They chatted for a while relating to each other their experiences and stories about life at seminary. Things were going rather well and cordial, that is until Stanley’s pastor dropped the bomb. That bomb being that he wanted Stanley to come home and preach to his old congregation.

Stanley, what in hindsight proved to be a terrible lack of judgement, considered his pastor’s proposal for about one nano-second, and gave his pastor and enthusiastic “yes”.

When Stanley hung up the phone he realized that there was just one problem – he had never given a sermon before – at least not a real one to adults from a pulpit.

Oh well, Stanley thought. I will just work really hard and it will turn out great.

And that is just what Stanley did. For the next two weeks he lived and breathed that sermon. And while Stanley knew that his delivery may be a little rough – his message and theology were right on.

Eventually the day of reckoning came. And Stanley proudly walked up to that pulpit preparing for what would surely be a great world class sermon. But just at that point, Stanley made one crucial mistake – he looked out into the congregation. And guess whom he saw – his grade 12 English teacher and his high school football coach.

All of a sudden Stanley began to sweat and tremble as the enormity of what he was about to do started to sink in. You see Stanley was now the one in front at the pulpit attempting to teach those, whom a few short years ago were the ones teaching him. The role reversal was almost too much to bear. No longer did Stanley feel the resolve and pride of Jeremiah, rather Stanley felt small and insignificant. After all, who was Stanley to bring the word of God to these people? These people already knew him and his family. They knew his faults and misgivings. Needless to say, the sermon did not go well. In fact, Stanley was so nervous that he condensed a 20 minute sermon into roughly half the time.

The next couple of days were difficult ones for Stanley. Stanley wondered to himself what this event said about his call to ministry. Since he can’t preach the Gospel, this must surely be a divine joke. Stanley even privately wondered if he was a participant in some Job like cosmological bet.

Have you ever noticed that it is very difficult to escape your reputation? Once people have an image of you in their minds, it is very difficult to change their perception.

Jesus encountered this attitude among those who thought they knew Him. He lived in a small town, in a small country.

The backwater village of Nazareth where He grew up was tiny. In the time of Jesus, the village of Nazareth took up no more space than a football field. Everybody knew everybody in Nazareth. People knew Jesus' mother and father. They would have even known Him as He worked at His trade in His father's carpenter shop. Perhaps He had built a piece of furniture for them or replaced a handle on one of their favorite tools or made a yoke for their oxen. After all, He did not begin His ministry until He was about thirty years old. For most of His adult life He labored in as a carpenter or builder.

You can imagine how these people responded when suddenly Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the One prophesied by the prophets. We read in today's lesson that His fellow countrymen began to grumble about Jesus because He said that He was the bread that came down from heaven. They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose mother and father we know?"

We can appreciate their disbelief for we have done the same thing to people. We put them in a box. We assign them to a category. We know where they came from, we know who their parents are, we know where they went to school, we can tell by their accent or by their appearance about their background and we make certain assumptions. And because we make those assumptions, we treat them in a certain way. Maybe, if we are a teacher, we subtly overlook them in class. If we are a police officer, perhaps we are a little more aggressive when we pull them over to the curb. If we are the president of the company, perhaps it slants the way we regard them when it comes time for a raise or a promotion.

Oh, none of this is intentional of course. We may not even be conscious of it. It simply saves our brains the time and energy of sorting out people individually. So, we sort them out by category. That is what the folks in today's text were doing: "We know who you are. You are Mary and Joseph's son. You're from Nazareth. That's farming country, isn't it? People are a little slow there. Well, maybe we can find a job for you that's not too taxing mentally." Do you think such things do not happen? Then you are naive. That is the way the human brain seems to operate.

They laughed at Jesus. "Bread from heaven? We know where you came from. You're Mary and Joseph's son." Be careful when you judge anyone else's potential.

It makes no difference where we come from...or how we look or talk...or who our parents are. We are all children of God. We all have more potential than we can ever exhaust. And there is One who can help us so orient our lives that we can overcome every obstacle. Christ is bread for the world. When we feed on Him we find we are able to accomplish more than we ever dreamed possible.

Our God is able to overcome any obstacles. Don't tell me where you came from. All that matters is where you are going - and Who is going with you. If the Man from the tiny town of Nazareth is with you - the Man who spent most of His adult life as a carpenter - the Man who was laughed at because they knew His father and mother - the Man who now reigns with the Father in glory - if that Man is going with you then hold on for a great adventure. But on the way, make certain that you do not make the same mistake that others make - of judging people on the basis of outward characteristics that have nothing to do with what's in their heart.

Amen.