

August 8-9th, 2021 – The 12th Sunday of Pentecost

Hebrews 5:11 – 6:3

Pastor Arndt

¹¹We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. ¹²In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

6 Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death,^[a] and of faith in God, ²instruction about cleansing rites,^[b] the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And God permitting, we will do so.

In Christ Jesus,

"Simple Gifts" was written by Joseph Brackett in 1848. Mr. Brackett was a *"Shaker"*, otherwise known as *"The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing"*. The words of the song celebrate Shaker principles of *simplicity* and *humility* which aim to lead us through the twists and turns of life until we (*as though floating effortlessly*) land in our place *"just right"*.

The song has a haunting melody. But more powerfully, I believe it taps into one of our basic desires. When presented with a question or choice, we want to have an answer that is *simple*.

Sometimes life presents us with simplicity. If the sign says, *"Don't feed the bear!"* you don't need to keep yourself up at night wondering if you should have given the bear a lick of your ice cream cone. Unfortunately, such simplicity is a rare thing. There are two conversations that I had this week which stick out in my mind.

If you are sick, you take medicine. That seems simple enough. But in our world, we must navigate complicated questions about vaccines and the methods used to create them. In one ear someone tells you that something is good. In the other ear someone says that the same thing is not good. We must decide if we should do something, but also what to do when someone says we *must* do something. Suddenly things are not so simple.

Balance is simple. To balance something all that you need to do is find the middle. How is the balance in your life? Are you spending too much time at work or not enough? Are you spending time with your family? What types of activities are you using to fill your time? Where does God fit into all this? Being out of balance is great if you are on an amusement ride. It's not so enjoyable in real life.

It would be a gift if we could face the decisions in our lives and *"come down where we ought to be"*, to find ourselves *"in the place just right"*.

God has such desires for you. Our lesson for this morning identifies the source of simplicity in our lives and carries us to maturity in Christ.

I. I Know... I Know!

As our lesson begins, the writer of Hebrews is trying to teach us about Jesus and his role as our High Priest. But he is forced to stop in his tracks. He says that it is hard to make his point because literally, *“you have become sluggish in listening.”*

There’s a phrase that we use when we’re sluggish in listening. It’s *“I Know, I know!”* I’m sure I said those words at least a thousand times to my father when he was trying to teach me. (*Usually, they’re spoken after something’s was broken or ruined.*) It’s a way of drawing a prideful line in the sand that says, *“I don’t need help”* at a time when we obviously do. Beware of listening to God’s Word while saying, *“I know, I know.”*

Some parts of the Bible are milk. But even milk needs to be digested. Digestion is a nitty gritty process in which you chew on something and let it churn in your stomach. Only then is it useful.

When we began our worship today, we started with some milk. *“Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed are they who take refuge in him.”* (Psalm 34: 8) Don’t let those words pass by while you say, *“I know, I know”*. Chew on them. Let them churn a while in your stomach. Ask yourself why we said those words as we confessed our sins. What does it mean that God is “good”? What good things has he done for sinful me?

That’s just the beginning of the digestion process. As things get tougher and meatier...

II. Find Contradictions... And Let Them Be Contradictions

The Bible is full of contradictions. Some of them are thought provoking. The last time I preached we talked about these words, *“They saw God, and they ate and drank”*. (Exodus 24: 11) Someone emailed me an excellent question. They said, *“Pastor, what does it mean when Jesus says, ‘No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God’?”* (John 6: 46). Those are great things to chew on and digest. What about those passages is similar? What is different?

Some contradictions, however, are more than thought provoking. They’re *impossible*. One of the things that made Martin Luther such a blessing to the church is that he learned from the Holy Spirit to let contradictions be contradictions. Here is one example. Luther summarizes what Scripture teaches us about Christian Freedom. He says,

“A Christian is a free lord, subject to no one.

A Christian is a ministering servant subject to all.”

Both statements are true. They’re like opposing teeth that grind away at every decision you make. After you’ve chewed on them for a while God slides them into your stomach and says, *“let these rumble around together as the Holy Spirit digests them and makes them into something God-pleasing and joyful”*.

Sometimes God gives us clear and specific instructions. (Don’t feed Bears!). It’s much more common, however, for God to give us Gospel principles to follow. It’s God’s desire for us to wrestle with those principles and digest them into God pleasing decisions. This is maturity.

This, of course, still leaves us with a problem. I'm sure that you've experienced at least one occasion when someone identified your behavior as childish. They shouted, "*Grow Up!*" (which often is met with even more childish behavior!)

III. God is permitting, we will do so

I have a need. "*You need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again.*" I also have a teacher. "*They will all be taught by God.*" God teaches us in a way which is so very precious. How did Jesus describe it in our Gospel lesson? *The Father will draw you to His Son.*

This is the Jesus who makes us lie down in green pastures and leads us beside quiet waters.

Even in the most tumultuous of times, may he give you the simple gift of peace and bring you exactly where you need to be. God is permitting. We will do so!

-Amen