

Once there was a businessman who decided to open a bar in his hometown. In response, a nearby church started a prayer campaign asking God to stop the bar from being built. All was going well up until the day before the grand opening when lightning struck the new building and it burned to the ground. When they received the news that the bar had been destroyed, the church members celebrated, claiming that it demonstrated the power of prayer.

Well, when he heard this, the bar owner sued the church for damages, on the grounds that they had been responsible for the destruction of his building... In response to the lawsuit, the congregation passionately denied all responsibility and said it was ridiculous to think that they had anything to do with a lightning storm...

The judge assigned to the case read through the complaint and at the opening hearing he said, "I don't know how I'm going to decide this, but it appears from the paperwork that we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer and an entire church congregation that doesn't."

Well, in recent weeks, you may remember that we have been reading through chapter six of John's gospel... We've talked a lot about food, beginning with the feeding of the five

thousand, and moving to the scandalous statement that Jesus is the bread that has come down from heaven... And, as we continue to find, this statement offends the vast majority of those who heard Jesus speak those words... So as Episcopalians, how do we make sense of it all? What does it mean for us today?

Well, our church has an interesting history regarding what we believe about the eucharist... You see, we ran into a bit of an identity crisis around four hundred years ago or so as we alternated between being Roman Catholic and Protestant depending on who the English king or queen was, and it wasn't until the Elizabethan Compromise that we found a way to settle things once and for all. We, in decidedly English fashion, choose to be both Catholic and Protestant in our theology. Which means that we have both a catholic and protestant understanding of Jesus' claim to be the bread of life.

We see this each week when we receive communion and hear the words: The body of Christ, the bread of heaven. The body of Christ... This is a very catholic understanding of the eucharist. When I hand you the bread and say, "the body of Christ," I am saying that, through the mystery of faith, the bread that we consume is somehow

more than just bread, I am saying that this bread is, the actual body of Christ... And on the other hand... (That's a very Episcopal thing to say by the way.... "on the other hand..." When I say the bread of heaven, this is a more protestant understanding of communion... The Bread of Heaven means that this bread that we eat is a symbol of Christ's gift of life and salvation to us through his sacrifice on the cross... "The body of Christ, the bread of heaven" Here is a purposefully conflicting statement. The first being very Catholic, and the second being very Protestant.

And when I hand you the bread and say this conflicting statement, I am in essence saying that whatever this mystery of faith means to you, take and eat, and may you abide in Christ and he in you... When we receive the bread and say amen, we are in essence saying yes to the mystery of faith that we find in the eucharist... We are saying yes to a sacrament where we believe that these elements have been set apart and made holy... We are saying yes to the belief that our eucharistic meal is something that binds us together in community, both with each other and with Christ.

Sometimes it does seem difficult to accept the teachings of Jesus. The Kingdom of God runs in complete opposition to the ways of this world. It can be easy to be

offended by the idea of loving our enemies, It can be easy to be offended by the idea of turning the other cheek... It can be easy to be offended by caring for the orphan, the widow, and welcoming the refugee. Yes, Jesus offends us, Jesus snaps us out of our tendency to look the other way, ignoring the suffering of others... Somehow, if we let him, Jesus is able to help us see beyond the walls that we hide behind and gives us his heart to love and care for others. Many people often find the ways of Jesus Offensive... 2000 years ago, Jesus was so offensive, that he was put to death.

And today, Jesus is still offending people, even me. Everyday, I'm offended, and everyday, I am reminded by the words of Peter that Jesus' words are the words of eternal life, that he is the holy one of God, crucified for the sins of the world and risen on the third day in glory. Everyday, I have found that I have the opportunity to choose... Will I cross my arms and say in my ignorance "Well, that's just not how the world works Jesus..." Or... will I accept the words of life that Jesus offers and open my arms and my heart to loving all those who God puts in my path... It's a choice I have to make every day... And I don't always make the right choice... But God is faithful, and keeps giving me opportunities to choose his ways rather than the selfish ways

of the world... We know that it is better to give than to receive, we know that when we forgive someone, when we truly forgive, that a part of ourselves that was trapped in the bondage of hatred is set free and our lives are all the better... We don't always get it right, and that's okay, but everyday, it is our duty to our God to try to live in such a way that we reach forth our hands in love so that all may come to know the joy and freedom in Christ's saving embrace.