

Can Make You Sense of Jesus?

John 6:24-35

INTRO:

The young rabbi was new in town. A couple of months after his arrival a pastor went by the synagogue to welcome him to the community. During the course of the conversation, he asked him, **“Now that you have graduated from theological school and are on your own, do you miss school?”** The young rabbi replied, **“As a Jew, you’re never really ‘on your own.’ And I don’t really miss much about school except when I’m reading scripture. As you probably know, it takes at least two Jews to read Torah—one to read, the other to help interpret.”** The pastor didn’t know that. When it comes to faithful reading and interpretation of scripture, no Jew is left to his or her own devices. It takes at least two Jews to read scripture.

Maybe that’s why theologian Stanley Hauerwas says that the biggest mistake the church made was to allow us Christians to take the Bible home with us in an attempt to read the Bible by ourselves.

Scripture is a group, corporate, communal product, and the interpretation of scripture is a group, corporate, communal product.

Most of you have had the experience of reading some passage of scripture, home alone, only to have the same passage discussed at a Bible study and have our interpretation challenged, corrected, and enlarged through discussion with others.

Can you make sense of Jesus?

When it comes to scripture as *God's-word-to-us revelation*, it's more than just **"two heads are better than one."** Scripture is what the church has produced; revelation is what the living, risen Christ speaks to us. What we need, as readers and hearers of scripture, is someone else to open our eyes, interpret the word. We require a power beyond our meager powers. We need someone to speak scripture to us or we'll never make sense of Jesus.

Can you make sense of Jesus?

ME:

I can make sense of Jesus . . . sometimes. But it helps too have others to bounce questions and concerns off of. *And I often am surprised at how much many of you already know and that though don't think you know anything!*

YOU:

Are you concerned at all by people who think they know everything?

ME TOO! I know some things, and so do you, but neither of us knows everything! Let's see if we can make sense of Jesus with John's help.

Let's pray together first...

GOD:

John 6:24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

26 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

WE:

Jesus talks and his words just sail right over their heads. He says **“living water”** and they think H₂O. He says **“bread”** and we think a loaf of bread.

We just don't get it.

In John's Gospel, we find it almost impossible to think about Jesus. **Is that so surprising, when you think about it?** This Gospel opens with the declaration, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.”**

“The Word” is John name for Jesus. God Almighty speaks a word to the world and the Word was made flesh and moved in among us. This **“Word”** . . . was God.

A word, who was God, stood among us and spoke to us us, but we couldn't hear. We loved **“darkness rather than light.”** He spoke wonderful words, and we remained in the dark.

And why not? He is eternal; we are temporary. He is the one **“came down from heaven”** and we are fixed here on earth.

We think about things on the basis of our past experience. We see something strange and immediately try to put it in the context of what is not

strange. This is how we make sense of things. We **“make sense”** by making things fit within the pattern of what is already known.

And for most experiences, it works.

Can we blame the disciples and the crowds for not making sense of Jesus?

If Jesus really is God’s Son, then we will have difficulty in making sense of Jesus. Our normal ways of thinking will fail, and we will be frustrated in our attempts to understand who Jesus is.

Jesus confuses them with talk of food from heaven and water that forever quenches thirst. He refers them to the miraculous food that Moses fed the Israelites within the wilderness. *None of that helps them.*

Jesus reminds them that the manna that helped the Israelites to survive was **“from God,”** not from Moses.

They don’t understand, but this is a clue. Jesus has fed the hungry multitude and we want to crown him as a king. Jesus has compared the bread that he gave the multitude to manna, the bread in the wilderness. And we still don’t get it.

And maybe we can’t get it except **“from heaven”** as a gift from God. Maybe what we need doesn’t arise out of the biblical text but is something that is added to our reading and hearing of the biblical text, a gift **“from**

heaven.” Maybe the one who **confuses** is also the one who **explains**. In all the misunderstanding there is one who stands **with us**, who patiently keeps teaching us, who doesn't stop loving us despite our incomprehension.

Maybe understanding is not the point. The point is to **allow** Jesus to keep working with us, to keep surprising us.

So what if you don't fully understand Jesus this morning? So what if you don't fully understand this sermon this morning? You are in the presence of the One **“come down from heaven.”** The point may be more than understanding.

*The point . . . is **presence**.*

And if you understand, *it's a miracle!* That is, it's a gift, a gift from heaven. Gift. Grace.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

We don't have to make sense of Jesus, we just have to be open to his speaking, revealing, making sense to us.

YOU:

Can you make sense of Jesus? If not, that's okay. As long as you remain open to him. As long as you don't give up just because you can't always make sense of him.

CLOSE:

How do we make sense of the world? How do we conceive of our earth home? In those old projection maps of the world, the globe is split apart and spread across the page like pieces of an orange peel. We can clearly see the world, but there are big gaps in our knowledge, spaces between the parts, separation, a lack of unity. This is one of the problems of modern knowledge. We see the parts but not their sum. We focus on the pieces, sometimes with great accuracy and insight, but there's no **"big picture,"** no overall, sweeping view.

We tend to see the trees but not the forest.

Let's not do that with Jesus, though. Let's let him help us make sense of the world.

Let's start now with prayer...