



ST ALBANS

Bread and Hard Feelings

The Rev. Simone Hurkmans

August 22, 2021, 13th Sunday after Pentecost

When my body won't hold me anymore

And it finally lets me free

Will I be ready?

When my feet won't walk another mile

And my lips give their last kiss goodbye

Will my hands be steady?

When I lay down my fears

My hopes and my doubts

The rings on my fingers

And the keys to my house

With no hard feelings

These are the first two verses of a song by the Avett Brothers. It's called No Hard Feelings. Whenever this song comes up on my iPhone, I have to just stop and listen. It's such a beautiful song. The melody is lovely. But it's these two first verses that really get me. They're all about those last moments at the end of life.

In my work I have the privilege to witness people's last weeks and days and hours and even minutes of life. Many of us have been at the bedside of a loved one who is dying. Many of us who haven't are terrified to imagine what that'll be like. When



ST ALBANS

it's our turn to hold vigil, we can be preoccupied with the practicalities. When did they get their last dose of painkiller? Why is the IV machine dinging? When is the doctor coming back? Would they like some ice chips?

There're also other questions to think about too. What does this person want for their funeral? What's to be done with their house, car, loans, etc.? Sometimes, there's worry about reconnecting with someone who's lost touch. Will they hold on until the estranged person come? Will that person even show up?

This song, though, gets to the even deeper questions that can easily get lost in the middle of these more practical questions. Sometimes, it's because there's too much to do at the bedside. But I wonder if it's not because we'd prefer not to ask or answer these questions. And it's therefore easier to busy ourselves with the practical matters.

This song hits us right in the feels with the deeper questions:

When my body won't hold me anymore

And it finally lets me free

Will I be ready?

My favourite part of my work as a priest is asking these deeper questions. On Queer Eye, I'm Karamo. When I visit a dying person, the people who have been spending day and night at their bedside need a break. So they often go off and have a coffee, or get some fresh air.



ST ALBANS

This is often when I can have these deeper conversations with the person who's getting ready to leave this earth. Are you ready? Are you ready to lay down your fears, your hopes and your doubts, the keys to your house? And what about those hard feelings? These conversations are beautiful. The Holy Spirit is right there with us, every time. What about those hard feelings? PAUSE.

"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil." This is what Paul tells us just before the reading we heard this morning in his letter to the Ephesians. We hear it often, make the most of your time.

And evil days, it certainly feels like it right now, doesn't it? It's the fourth wave of a deadly virus attacking the planet. The lightning-fast fall of Afghanistan, setting women's rights back 20 years in a matter of hours. Wildfires burning out-of-control in BC. The IPCC's report on climate change giving us terrible news on the fate of our planet.

In the midst of all this, make the most of your time. But do we really hear it? What does it mean? Make the most of your time? Paul tells us to not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery, but rather we should be filled with the Spirit, as we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, giving thanks to God at all times. And we can understand that, can't we? Giving thanks for what we have. Laying down our hard feelings. But it can be tough. How do we do that in the midst of our day to day lives?

Our Gospel reading is a tough one. Eat my flesh. Can we picture ourselves as one of Jesus' disciples, hearing that directly from Jesus? Eat my flesh? What now? Jesus in this passage is telling his confused disciples something important: I am the living bread. I am your sustenance.



ST ALBANS

Have you seen the meme “I think my soulmate might be carbs”? It’s funny because we all intuitively understand this, don’t we? When we’re feeling low or small and we eat something bread-like, cookies, crackers, we feel better. Jesus isn’t advocating for us to eat our feelings away. He’s trying to get us to understand what a relationship with him feels like. Trying to put words to something that’s hard to describe. That’s why he tells so many parables.

Jesus says I am the living bread. I am what will keep you going in the midst of despair. I am life. My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. In the midst of life’s ups and downs, those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

It’s easy to see this passage as Jesus setting up an exclusive club. Who’s in and who’s out. But I don’t think that’s what he’s after. He’s talking about what sustains. About what gives us life. It’s about more than Holy Communion. It’s about abiding in Christ every day. It’s about bringing our hard feelings, our fears, to Jesus and letting him work through us. That’s what we’re called to as Christians.

But why though? Just so that we can personally feel better? Living as a Christian is about more than just living our best lives. It’s more than self-help. It’s about becoming more whole, more aware, more healed, yes, but all this so that we can go out and serve. Our Creator wants to make us whole, to work through our brokenness, to use our brokenness, so that we can go out and serve the other. It’s harder to serve when we’re struggling with anxiety. It’s harder to serve when we don’t believe in ourselves. It’s harder to serve when we are spiralling in shame or sadness.



ST ALBANS

Although I can't share with you the specifics of what people have told me on their deathbed, I can say this. It's always about relationships. Gratefulness for family, friends. A thankfulness for having served in a job they loved. Or a thankfulness for great colleagues in a job they didn't love. There's sometimes regret, for not having reached out enough, for not mending a rift.

I am the living bread. Taste and see that the Lord is good. So that when it's our turn, to lay down our fears, our hopes and our doubts, the rings on our fingers, and the keys to our house, we'll have no hard feelings.

My questions for Open Space: When we picture ourselves in our last moments, what do we hope we'll be reflecting on? What can we do today to help make that happen?