My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord of our Hearts, Minds, Souls, and Spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight, our strength and our Redeemer, Amen.

Remember what we talked about last week? Of course we do. But just in case we don’t, let’s review a little bit. Jesus was speaking about how he was the bread of life, and we talked alllll about how bread is essential, for sure, but it can be really tricky to get right. Bread needs 4 essential ingredients: salt, yeast, water, and flour. Get those in the right proportion, and that’s just the start. They it takes some skill in mixing, kneading, proofing, waiting, and maybe repeating that process. Try and rush it and you’ll end up with little bricks that can hardly be tasty or chewed easily. Wait too long and you end up with soooo much dough that the baking is…well…challenging to say the least, and you may end up with a huge crazy loaf of air that will neither bake or slice well.

I’m not saying that Jesus’ assertion that his words and teachings are not the bread of life and can be accessed by us no matter how we eat that bread or how it comes out. But the whole point of reading the Bible, coming together to worship God, study others who have followed that bread-making process, and accessed that bread so that it tastes beyond our expectations is that we can figure out how to do that once in a while, then a little more often, and ultimately know the recipes and process by heart.

We don’t want to grumble. We don’t want manna that sustains but doesn’t satisfy. We want to know that God’s word and presence is, in the words of David and the psalms, is sweet as honey on our lips. We want that taste and sustenance for each day of our lives, the daily Bread for which we are taught to pray.

Now, for a few weeks each spring and summer in the lectionary, we go from studying the synoptic gospels into the Gospel of John. There are lots of images, trying to expand our minds so that we can feel things beyond our senses. There’s a reason why it starts out in the Prologue, the beginning, saying that Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. And Jesus is here to say, yes, absolutely, that’s what I am. In order to have God’s presence and keep God’s commandments and follow God’s teachings as they are meant to be followed, you must take ME into your mind, body, heart, soul, and Spirit.

That was last week. With the backdrop of the allegory of breadmaking, we said all that. Now do we remember? OK. So let’s go.

The last sentence of this scripture says that he said all these things—about being the bread of life and saying that the close relationship of God that we seek is with him. And who is he? The Word of God, made flesh. What Jesus is saying here is that the life God intends for us is entirely possible, right here, right now, if we follow what Jesus is teaching, healing, preaching, and exhorting us to do.

God’s promises go beyond what Moses taught. What Jesus says—in the synagogue, the holy place of both God and the people of God—is that while we have created all kinds of laws in our head around how to protect ourselves and what we’ve created, we have left out our hearts and what is needed to make those things real for all creation. All that God created. All persons and creatures, not just those with the privilege to flit and float freely in society comfortably because we are wealthy and well-fed. We need our communion with God to include those not included in our cliques in which we live our everyday life.

Jesus teaches us to remember that the blessed are the ones forgotten in our world. The poor, the brokenhearted, the prisoner, the disinherited, and grieving, the sick, the naked, and the poor in Spirit who need hope the most. These folks are the ones who the world has forgotten, and as a result, they are the ones to whom God can pour in blessings of the Spirit. Love. Compassion. Mercy. Kindness. When Jesus says that when we fully remember the promises of God, and live them, then God abides in us always. We then have the blessings of God in us for all time, and as we become one with God in perfect unity as it was in Creation, we inherit these blessings of the Spirit and become one with the forgotten ones of the world.

But here’s the rub. We SAY we want these things, but we also don’t want to give up our current comforts and life to do what Jesus, who is God, says we must do. We want it both ways, don’t we? We want to continue to support laws and barriers that keep out and keep down those who we don’t even see. We create stories of fear to support our pre-judgements, which, by the way, are the two root words of prejudice. Unemployment creates drug dependency. Drug dependency creates crime. Crime creates drug trafficking. Drug trafficking implies that folks from other countries are trying to hurt our kids, and so in the name of national security, we restrict even folks fleeing violence from other lands from having refuge. Funny how that works in a land that was built on folks fleeing persecution of kings, wars, and famine. Our predilection for protection becomes a denial of what Christ is teaching, that when folks are down we have an obligation to reach out and help figure out how we did these things to our neighbors. Why do we not love our neighbor as Christ has loved us? This is the new commandment of the Gospel of John—it’s no longer enough to love our neighbor. It’s no longer enough to love our neighbor as ourselves. Christ says we must “love one another as I have loved you”.

God loves us first, and unconditionally. And when we eat the bread of life, when we take God’s promises in, we say that we understand this. But do we pass that love on in our everyday actions, in our voices and social circles and when we hear or see wrongs being said against our neighbors? Do we really understand what abide means, what God not just wants but has commanded we do, and how often we just turn the other way?

This is precisely why we heard last week that the folks who heard this teaching in the synagogue, the ones who say they love God, grumbled. Human behavior hasn’t changed in 2,000 years. They are just as pre-judgy as we are, wanting to be praised for the faith in the Church on the Sabbath but wanting to go and do their own thing. They heard Jesus, who is God, the Word made flesh, and they not only rejected his teaching, but they would later kill him for it.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

Our world loves power, with haves and have-nots, and separates folks along class, racial, ethnic, gender, and economic lines. But God’s world rejects these distinctions. God says love is what matters first and most, and if we practiced that, we would start to see the ones who we don’t see now. God loves what the world rejects and hates. And part of abiding with God is to become not just aware but also to live as one who the world rejects and hates. To know their pain, sorrow, and suffering, not because it is deserved but because it is given by a world which doesn’t wish to know them. That’s why we say there is no other way to know God but through the Cross.

God’s love sounds like tough love. It’s not meant that way. It’s meant to give freedom from all our expectations and the current constraints WE place on ourselves. God’s love is freeing us to do what we are meant for, to celebrate the Creation as it is intended. As a blessed union with our creator, who is also our redeemer from ourselves, and our sustainer to remind us each day that we are loved. The bread and water of life, friends, is an invitation. It awaits our RSVP.

Thanks be to God, Amen.