

Where Is He Coming From?
[John 6:35-51](#)
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1. How does God break into our lives?

Even though Danville schools start back tomorrow, we are still technically in the midst of summer, and many of you have been coming and going, as we often do. Sometimes we have trips that we plan and that we prepare for for weeks, but other times we have something come up and we feel like we have to take advantage of the opportunity.

I had one of those this past week, as my seminary roommate, Grant, sent me a message and told me that he would be in North Carolina for the week. He is a Navy chaplain in Japan, and I hadn't seen him in almost two years, so I jumped at the chance to go spend time with him.

So last week, I headed down to Montreat, NC, for a night while he was finishing up a chaplains' conference. We hung out on the porch and then had lunch the next day, and we also caught up with a cousin of mine who happens to be a retired Navy captain. We met for coffee and it was fascinating to hear each of them talk about the ways in which they could—or could not—express their faith while members of the armed services.

In particular, Grant mentioned that he is always surprised when others are surprised when he brings up questions of faith. As a chaplain, Grant wears a cross in a prominent place on his uniform, so he feels like he's advertising that, "Hey, if you come and ask me what I think, you might hear about Jesus." Still, people are often shocked when Grant mentions his faith, and my cousin was well acquainted with that phenomenon.

As I mentioned earlier, when I was almost home from visiting Grant, I came upon an accident right in front of the Schoolfield Museum. A few other people from the cars ahead of me had already stopped and called 911, and they were trying to keep the young man still and secure. Once it was clear that he understood where he was and that he needed to be still and the Danville Life Saving Crew was on its way, I asked if we could pray. It took everyone else a second to realize what I had said, as if a request to pray had come out of nowhere, but after a second we prayed and then continued to wait.

So as I was reflecting upon this passage from John 6 this week, I had some conversations and one real life experience about the surprise that we might have when God is brought into our real-life experiences...

...or should I say, the surprise that we might have when God is *acknowledged* in our real-

life experiences. Sometimes we can get so wrapped up in life that we forget that in everything we do, God is right there with us. After all, God *is always* there: always with us, always beside us, always at work. One of the best expressions of this that I have ever heard comes from an old poem that is attributed to St. Patrick—you know, the one from Ireland—and the poem is called “St. Patrick’s Breastplate.” There is a particular verse of it that goes like this:

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me. Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

The poem is called “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” because it was Patrick’s prayer of protection as he went forward in life. His protection was Christ. Jesus was his breastplate, because Patrick knew that whatever came at him, Jesus was there with him.

This is an easy thing for us to say today, and an easy thing for us to recite, because we know that it is true. God is always with us, in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Then again, this is also something that we tend to forget from time to time. I forget it, you forget it, we all forget it. If we always remembered that God is always with us, then we would never treat others unkindly. We would never engage in behavior that goes against God’s desires, we would never ignore injustice...

But we do all of those things from time to time. We go through our lives, and we can often forget that God is with us. Then we can be surprised when He makes an appearance. Sometimes that surprise is welcome, but other times that surprise can be a bit scary because it brings us face-to-face with difficult truths.

2. What is our reaction?

So, how do we react when God breaks into our lives, not just when we are surprised that God comes up in conversation or when someone asks to pray, but when we realize that He’s there and He’s been there all along?

In the passage that Gene just read for us, Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people who had come looking for him because he had fed thousands of people the previous day. In fact, he had performed a miracle—he had fed them with only a few loaves and fish—but they weren’t following him because of the miracle. They were following him because they wanted more food. Jesus points this out to them pretty bluntly. In the passage we studied last week, he actually said, “you are following me not because of the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” In today’s passage, Jesus says, “as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.”

But even though Jesus says this, he goes on trying to explain to them that it is not a physical meal that he is offering them, but rather a Spiritual one. To make his point, Jesus says, “I am the bread that has come down from Heaven.” In that moment, the people were confronted with something that had not occurred to them. In that moment, the people had to consider the possibility that God was right there with them...

...and how did they respond?

They grumbled and said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”

That makes perfect sense, right? Many of these people had known Jesus, or at least had known his family, for years. How could he suddenly up and say, “I came down from heaven?” Even if these people were expecting the Son of God to come to them, they certainly weren’t expecting him to be someone that they knew.

To put in in our terms, let’s think of it this way: let’s say a mysterious person that nobody in Danville had ever seen came into town and started teaching new things. He gave new insights on what was going on in the world, and when people ask how he knows these things, he says, “I came from the future.”

Well, most people probably wouldn’t believe that, but if you did—even if you were still interested enough to keep listening—what would be your first question?

It would be, “What’s the future like? Tell us about it!” You would want to know.

Now, let’s say that you’re having a conversation with your neighbor up the street who’s lived there for 30 years, and he says something interesting. You ask him how he knows that and he says, “I came from the future!” What would you say?

You’d say, “No you didn’t! You’ve been living here for 30 years. Our kids were in the same carpool!”

So we can understand where the crowd was coming from if they didn’t understand where Jesus was coming from. Jesus was right there in front of them telling them that he had been sent by the Father to tell them the truth about God, but they didn’t understand. They didn’t know how to respond when they were told that God had broken into their lives, and they were resistant to what Jesus was trying to tell them. They didn’t know what to do when God made His presence known in their lives.

3. What might we be missing?

So do we know what to do when God makes His presence known in our lives?

Of course, there are many times when God makes his presence known in our lives, and we are grateful and we celebrate, and we know that He is at work in many good ways. For that matter, I'm sure that if I were to ask any of you if you wanted God to make His presence known in your life, you would say yes. But the reality is that God communicates his presence not only through wonderful gifts and miraculous signs, but also through difficult times and hard truths.

We don't always invite those, but they are still examples of God at work; and just like the crowd of people in today's Bible passage, we don't always react to those times in the ways that we should. Just like the people in this story, we might receive God's presence and His truth as criticism, and we might withdraw in discomfort without realizing what God is truly trying to reveal to us.

I don't know about you, but when I hear this passage, it is difficult to get past the first thing that Jesus says: "you have seen me and still you do not believe," or as we could also translate it, "you have seen me, and still you do not trust." Just like last week, when Jesus exposed to that the people that they were only following him because of food, this week's passage starts out with a pointed statement from Jesus.

It is a hard truth, and when we receive hard truths, we can often get defensive and feel criticized. When that happens, we can shut ourselves off from things that we need to hear that would actually be to our benefit. I mean, how often does that happen with a friend or a family member or a loved one? If someone tells us something that we don't want to hear, aren't we prone to getting defensive and shutting off?

But the reality is that it takes courage to tell people what they don't want to hear, and in most cases, it also takes love. That means that quite often, along with the criticism, there is a message of love and caring. Now, it doesn't always seem like it, and sometimes when we might be frustrated or angry with someone we can have a tough time combining those hard truths with loving words, but even if that's the case then somewhere deep down we are coming from a place of love.

With that in mind, let's look back at how the people reacted to Jesus and what Jesus said afterward. When Jesus told the people the harsh truth about themselves, the people got defensive. Last week, they argued that Moses had given them food in the desert, and this week, they rationalized that they had known Jesus for all of his life. They started grumbling.

But let's look back at exactly what Jesus said to them:

"Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

So far so good, right? That's great news.

“But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.”

But there is the hard truth. Think about Jesus's audience— you can kind of see a shift in their attitude here. He's accusing them of unbelief. But then Jesus goes on to say this:

“All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

How great is that? Right after he accuses them of unbelief, he says to them, “but if you come to me, then you will never be turned away!” Even though they weren't following him for the reasons that they should have been, and even though they didn't completely believe him, Jesus still says to them that if they come to him then he will never turn them away. In fact, he tells them that they will be with him through the end of time!

But how did the crowd respond? They started grumbling. “How can he say he came down from Heaven? We know this guy...we've known him for years!”

They had already shut themselves off from hearing the good news that Jesus had for them. But right when they started grumbling, Jesus told them to stop grumbling! Then instead of defending himself against their criticism, he doubles down on his message and says again that the Father is drawing people to him, and it is their job to believe. It's not their job to make sense of it all— it's not even Jesus's job to make sense of it all— but it is their job to trust and believe in the will of God.

Jesus gives this message even to people who had questionable motives and who didn't fully believe what he is saying. But the message he gives is, “come to me.” That is some of the best news that we can hear, because it means that we don't have to have everything straight in our lives in order to come to Jesus. We are all incomplete, we are all broken people, yet Jesus says to us, “come to me.”

Even when they get defensive and doubt him, Jesus still says, “come to me.” We don't have to have everything figured out, and we don't even have to be completely sure where Jesus is coming from, but he still calls us to him. When God confronts us with a harsh truth— whether He communicates it to us in our hearts or through someone else— he is also saying, “come to me. I know that you are incomplete, I know that you have questions, I know that you might be scared or hurt or defensive...but come to me.”

Being surprised by God is an invitation to draw closer to Him. That is why He came to us as Jesus, so that we may draw closer. That is why He gives us the Holy Spirit, so that we may be confronted by God in the world and in one another, even in ways that we might not always want to be.

But along with that encounter, God invites us to Him, not so that we may be condemned, but so that we may be redeemed. After all, how does Jesus end this little lesson?

He says, “Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Jesus gave his own life so that we may be redeemed. He died so that we may know just how far God is willing to go to reach us, so that we may set aside ourselves and our shortcomings and our doubts and come to him.

So when we are confronted by God, do we retreat into ourselves and our own defenses, or do we repent and come to him? It is our task to draw closer to Christ, and as we do, he answers our doubts, he redeems our sinfulness, and he gives us good news to believe; so let us go to him now in prayer...