

Pentecost 11-August 8, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

John 6:31-45

“Drawn by the Father” *Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Your bulletin cover poses the question, “Being drawn by God?”. The picture on the bulletin cover looks as if there is a tug of war between two hands. Since the words “drawn by God” are in the gospel for today, we can assume one of these hands must be God’s and the other must be our hand. But in this picture, there is no clear indication who is winning this tug of war, so it is appropriate in this picture to ask the question “Being drawn by God?” In this picture, it isn’t clear who is pulling who?

Three years ago, at this time, we were celebrating the 150th anniversary of our Nidaros congregations. Dr. Stephen Paulson preached at this worship service on this same text about Jesus being the bread of life. I recall Dr. Paulson proclaimed that this was one of Jesus’ worst sermons ever delivered. It was his worst sermon based on the responses of his listeners. In the verses included in the reading for today, we learn that the Jews were complaining about what Jesus was preaching. But the Jews were not the only people who didn’t like what Jesus was saying. In fact, when we read further in the 6th chapter of John, we learn that no one liked what Jesus had to say, including his own disciples.

Jesus began speaking today declaring that he is the bread of life. But the bread of life that Jesus was referring to was not the same bread of life that was still in the minds and stomachs of the people who were flocking to Jesus. Jesus reminded the people that the prophets had once said “All shall be taught by God”. And the time had come. Jesus was the teacher. The people were satisfied with what they knew. They were interested in what Jesus could do but wanted nothing to do with his teachings.

When you heard this lesson for today you might wonder what bothered them so much. What Jesus said, sounds like good news. Jesus said that coming to him and believing in him would **remove their hunger and thirst**. Jesus said that he would hand over **everything** to them that his Father would give to him. He told them that it is the will of his Father that **none** of them would be lost. Although they, like us, don't completely understand everything about the resurrection, he said that he would **raise them up on the last day**. Jesus said that whoever believes would have eternal life. That is an amazing list of promises. What turned them from wanting this bread of life?

The tables turned from flocking to Jesus to wanting to flog Jesus when Jesus taught them that this is **the Father's will**. They had been taught from Moses about what to do and what not to do and believed that if they did what was right the gates of heaven would be opened to them. Jesus had removed their idea that they had control of their salvation with this teaching from God that salvation is not their will, but their Father's will. They didn't mind eating the free lunch that Jesus had given them but rejected the idea of free salvation. Coming to God was fine if they did the walking. Hearing that they were being drawn by the Father caused their grips to tighten around the rope and pull away.

The Greek root of the word drawn is not like when opposite poles of a magnet attract each other. The root of the word drawn is better described as pulled or dragged. Being drawn is not an attraction but being pulled even if it is against your will. Jonah experienced what it means to be drawn to the Father when God's will be won over Jonah's resisting his call.

I apologize if I might have used this illustration before, but I remember one time when we had a tractor that quit running. It was dead. It wouldn't start or move on its own. We weren't sure what was wrong, but it needed to be moved out of the way. We got another tractor and connected a chain to the one that was dead weight. I was on the tractor that was doing the pulling. As we started to move it, my son who was trying to steer the dead tractor hollered up to me, "Where are we going?" I said, it doesn't matter. You simply need to follow me where I want you

to go. He probably took it as sarcasm, which of course was my comment's intent. But this event illustrated to me what it meant to be drawn by the Father. He resisted my control over where I was deciding that we were going. He thought maybe his steering was helping, but the tractor that I was driving was much larger and the smaller tractor that had no power was about to follow wherever I wanted it to. Jesus wasn't being sarcastic in telling those listening that the Father was going to pull them wherever he decided they were going. Jesus was giving them a promise. Jesus took away the free will that they thought they had and taught them about with the will of the Father.

The false notion of having a free will did not just begin with what Jesus was teaching that day. Adam and Eve falling for the lies of the serpent in the Garden is not an example of free will. Adam and Eve's will be bound by a desire to be like God by eating fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They were not satisfied with what God promised he would provide for them.

In the first lesson for today, Elijah wanted to take matters in his own hands as well rather than trust in his Father's will. Just previous in our reading for today, King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, threatened to kill Elijah. Elijah fled from her and hightailed into the wilderness. Instead of dying by the hand of Jezebel, Elijah tells the Lord to take his life. Elijah wanted to draw the Lord to him and have him do what he willed to be done. Elijah asked for death, but it was the Lord's will to deliver bread and water to him in the wilderness. After giving the meal to Elijah, the Lord didn't carefully awaken Elijah or give him a choice if he wanted to eat and drink what had been given to him. The Lord said, "Get up and eat." It was the Father's will to give life by receiving bread. Then to make certain that Elijah knew whose will was going to be done, another meal was provided for Elijah, and he was commanded to get up and eat.

We get a double dose of being taught by God today that we are drawn to Father whether we think it is also our idea or if we are dragged along like a toddler to his bed when they don't want to go.

If you have ever taken a personality assessment, you often will respond to a statement and then you might read another one that seemed like one that you had already answered. Quite often these assessments will make a statement in a positive way and then in a negative way, but they mean the same thing. This is done to be sure that you understood the statement. Jesus does the same so that you know what being drawn by God is not a question or a decision on your part, but a promise delivered by God. First Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless drawn to the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person on the last day." Then to remind them that this is not a new teaching, but the same teaching that was taught by the prophets of old, Jesus quotes Isaiah, "Everyone who has heard from the Father comes to me."

You have just been drawn to the Father today. This is not a question for you to ponder, but a promise to trust. You have heard from God and have been taught by him. He will not let go of you today and it is the Father's will to pull you into eternal life. Amen