



At A Distance – June 28, 2020 Pentecost 4

Spam and the Apocalypse

**" Blessed are you who give even a cup of cold water
to these little ones in my Name."**

I have a confession to make today. In front of you Blessed Ones. Saints both here at All Saints today in person, and to our Virtual Congregation as well. I am baring my soul before you all today. Confessing before my faith community, before my spiritual advisor, before my nutritional and life coach...I am unable or perhaps unwilling to release my lone remaining vice. A guilty pleasure that I have had since childhood and even with occasional herculean effort, I am unable to be free of. I love Spam!

Yes, there it is Saints. I love Spam. That most amazing of World War II-era food creations of the Hormel Meat Company. Spam, that glorious salty conglomeration of pork shoulder and "other meat parts," secret spices, potato starch, sugar, sodium nitrate and bone gelatin all neatly packaged in that familiar squarish blue tin. Conveniently eaten hot or cold with equal joy. Spam was introduced by Hormel on July 5, 1937 and was originally intended to increase the sale of pork shoulder which was not a very popular cut. The name Spam, according to Hormel executives is a shortened version of "spiced ham." However, popular culture had other ideas that Spam is actually an acronym meaning "some parts are meat."

I suspect at this point you are all probably wondering this morning, exactly where this Spam 101 course is going. While marginally interesting in a social context, exactly where is the connection to today's scriptural passages? Did Jeremiah eat Spam? No definitely not as Leviticus and pork shoulder are definitely not congruent. Paul perhaps? Jesus? Were the loaves and fishes in Matthew accompanied by the famous blue tins perhaps. No not that at all, but here is the thing.... Yesterday, Mona went on a supply run to WinCo, and on the list was of course my favorite processed meat product. Not a can to be had! No Spam Lite, no turkey Spam, no jalapeno Spam, no low salt Spam...no Spam permutation of

any kind anywhere. Totally sold out. *Hmm...interesting*, I thought. Could it be that Spam is taking over the role as society's worry indicator? Has the "pending catastrophe" barometer shifted from toilet paper to the Blue Rectangular Can? This was a hypothesis worthy of further data gathering. So yesterday, after visits to Safeway, Fred Meyer, Albertsons and even Grocery Outlet, my hypothesis became theory with the application of additional data. No Spam anywhere! Yes, Saints, Spam is the canary in the coal mine. Spam is the inferential measurement parameter that indicates that our society is "girding its collective loins for the Apocalypse, the "end days." Our eschatological fascination and preoccupation as Christians with the ultimate end of things, The End Times, Apocalypse, The Second Coming. But, this preoccupation is not new or exclusive to today.

There was a lot of conversation in Jesus' time in the first century around the "end times." Some historians and theologians have classified Jesus as an "apocalyptic preacher and teacher" focused on the end days. I am not sure that is totally true. I do know that the later writers of the Gospels certainly were. Paul certainly was, as was Luke. In fact, the common thinking around Christianity in those days was that the disciples wouldn't even be able to visit all the cities in Galilee, and Judea before they would be faced with the End Days, the Apocalypse, the re-appearance of the Son of Man. This event was going to happen soon, happen right now, it their very generation so, believers best get ready!

Well, if Jesus actually spoke like this, it must have been the human/fallible part of Jesus, because as we all know, that did not happen either then or now. Generation after generation has passed on, many still claiming that the Apocalypse and the 2nd Coming of the Son of Man was imminent. Any time now.... This year for sure...some still say. Well, we humans never ever seem to get the timing right, do we? As end-time prognosticators, our record is zero for "a whole lot," so many, it is hard to remember them all. So why are we Christians so focused on Jesus' Second Coming, when it seems that so often, we do our best to ignore His first?

Saints, I believe that Jesus' actual focus, his guidance, his direction and his Vision was much more specific, pointed, targeted and intimate. More like we hear in our Gospel today in Matthew: "Blessed are you who give so much as even a cup of cold water to these little ones in my Name."

This Saints is not an eschatological message at all, not focused on some grandiose, dramatic world cataclysm, and grand End Times return. No Saints, this is an example of what I believe is Jesus' true message. These small kindnesses, little blessings, personal contacts, intimate moments that are the true mortar that holds the Jesus Way, The Jesus Movement together. Jesus is telling us today to focus! Stop worrying about what could happen...or might happen...or what will happen.... But instead, focus and be present rather on what IS happening, right now, right here, at this very moment. Jesus is asking us to see, to be aware and then to respond. So, let's have a look.

Our military trainers, our Warriors use a couple of ideas that I will co-opt here this morning. The first is "situational awareness." This is the ability to view the environment around us and to recognize that it is changing all the time. Opportunities and challenges are occurring spontaneously and disappearing just as fast. Our space around us, "our situation" is always in transition. It is not always the battlefield of our warriors, but it could be our work, our family, our community -- but more likely the immediate situation that I find myself in -- church, Fred Meyer, the ball field, playing with our children and grandchildren, on our social media platforms. Situational awareness, what is changing, what is staying the same...recognizing both and responding appropriately.

The second term is "head on a swivel." This is slang and military vernacular for always looking and seeing in all directions, all the time, as we never know from which direction the next threat or opportunity may come from. Checking your "6" behind you. Paying attention!

The perfect adaptation of these techniques is a third concept; something called "big view/little view." Yes, we have to keep our collective heads up and see what is changing and evolving around us (our situational awareness). We have to keep our situational awareness high and tight or we could inadvertently miss an opportunity. And then once we see the opportunity we have to focus, narrow our field of view, block out everything else and execute our response. Like Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel today. It is all about seeing who needs the drink of water and delivering it. I'll share a story with you from last Thursday which is a perfect example of what we are learning about today.

It was Thursday. I was in 7-11 waiting in the long and socially distanced line to buy for our beach trip. Everyone was in a hurry and ready to be about their respective days. A young woman who was trying to buy a coffee, a loaf of bread and a couple of treats for her children waiting in the car, had the line hopelessly bogged down. Her debit card was being declined and declined and declined. As the rest of the shoppers waited, you could see the collective temperature and frustration rising by the minute; the shuffling, the eye rolling, the shifting foot-to-foot. The cashier's continued apologies. Tears of embarrassment and shame appeared in the eyes of the young woman who kept repeating her lament, "I know I have 7 dollars left. I am sure of it..." And with each subsequent debit card failure, the young woman seemed more and more lost. It was then that an elder, a couple of customers back, stepped forward and said, "Hey don't worry my girl, I got this, I got your coffee today." And proceeded to purchase her coffee. And then a young woman deep in line, said, "I've got the Bread and the treats...no worries." Then quietly, secretly, gently and discretely a third line-stander slipped a wordless \$20 bill into the young woman's open purse. I don't think anyone else but me saw that last move and she turned to me and just quietly put her finger to her lips..."shh." Wordlessly, she winked. This was just between us. Silently, and effortlessly, Jesus' "cup of cold water to the little one" was passed from one to another, to another, until all were filled.

Situational awareness...seeing things changing around us...recognizing an opportunity...being mindful, in-the-moment, focused, immediate..."head on a swivel" and then executing with precision, kindness, gentleness and grace. Seeing who is thirsty and passing the cup at that moment. This, Saints, is the Jesus that I know, the Jesus Way of kindness and dignity and grace. So, what do I say then to all of the Spam-hoarding apocalypse- waiting, End Timers? The Jesus you seek is right before your eyes. Focus, see and then do. Jesus doesn't need to come again, because He never really left, I saw Him three times in the 7-11 just last Thursday. Amen, Aho.