



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

June 9, 2019

Jesus and Jambalaya
Dr. Bruce Lancaster

Jesus and Jambalaya

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

© 2019 by Dr. Bruce Lancaster and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: June 10, 2019

Psalm 34:4-10
Hebrews 10:19-25

I have to ask, “How many of you have had real Jambalaya?”

I’m talking about Jambalaya that comes from restaurants in places like Gueydan or Thibodeaux or Breaux Bridge in South Louisiana, or for even more fun, at a tailgate party outside LSU stadium on a football Saturday night in Baton Rouge!

Jambalaya is a Cajun dish. It can be seafood jambalaya or chicken jambalaya or sausage jambalaya; or you can have seafood-chicken-sausage jambalaya!

You can really have “whatever you want” jambalaya, because growing up in Louisiana with my grandmothers’ good cooking, jambalaya for us was leftovers.

So, if you’ve paid good money for Jambalaya at a restaurant, you’ve just paid for leftovers!

Whatever meat you had was cooked together with some seasonings and the holy trinity of onions, celery, and bell pepper, add some tomatoes and rice and water and let it cook.

What made me think of jambalaya was this text from Hebrews: *“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”*

Some translations like the NRSV say ‘provoke one another’ or others ‘spur one another; but I like the picture of the translation, “to stir up one another to love and good works.”

For when you do jambalaya right, you can take a little of this and a little of that; never would have thought of adding that, but let's try it anyway; sprinkle in a pinch here, a dash there, and you stir it up and let it cook; and to quote God from Genesis, "It is good."

Now, I know that quite often when we think about stirring something up, it's trouble.

All around us, somebody is trying to stir us up: politics, family, internet ranting and raving...

We get stirred up to anger and trouble. We see it in the church, provoking us, inciting us, stirring us up...And there are times we do the stirring up...

We get stirred up to trouble, and that's really not a good dish to bring to church dinners.

John Calvin wrote this over 450 years ago, but it seems to fit our lives so well today: "There is so much peevishness in almost everyone that individuals, if they could, would gladly make their own churches for themselves..."

That's the church with the unholy trinity of 'me, myself, and I."

Calvin goes on to say this about life together as Christians: "This...is therefore more than needed by all of us that we should be encouraged to love rather than hate and that we should not separate ourselves from those who are joined to us by a common faith..."

That's a good word for us on this Pentecost Sunday.

What we need, he's saying, is to model those first Christians who had gathered together in that upper room after Jesus had ascended to heaven, men and women, united by a common faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

In the first two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke writes they were there for about ten days before Pentecost, this day in which we celebrate the birth of the church and its mission.

Those men and women devoted themselves to prayer, listened to the apostles' teaching, conducted some church business by selecting an apostle to replace Judas, and they broke bread together.

They were starting the custom, as our reading from Hebrews says, of meeting together, encouraging each other in the common faith they shared.

Then the Holy Spirit moved them out into the world on Pentecost.

That story of Pentecost, all those people meeting together, that's why I like this picture of Jesus and Jambalaya, that Jesus takes the leftovers: the weak, the poor, the sick, the outcasts, the oppressed, the sinners, the faithful and fearful, and puts them all together, stirs them up for love and good works to go out into the world in his name.

We are ingredients that Jesus uses...The psalmist puts it in these terms: "to taste and see that the Lord is good."

Too many people have a bad taste about the Christian faith and the church; it's bland, boring, hard-to-swallow.

And what they too often see is a very bad presentation of the good news dish we would offer.

But to taste and see that the Lord is good should be like Jesus and Jambalaya, because the Jesus I know and the jambalaya I like are anything but bland and boring.

It's the 'good taste' added to life when we are stirred up to love and good works.

Maybe you saw the recent story of Chy, a young girl, a sophomore in high school; physically, mentally challenged, being bullied.

Her mother called the quarterback of the football team, a son of a friend, and wanted names of the bullies.

The quarterback got stirred up. He and some of his teammates started sitting with Chy at lunch, walking with her to class.

The bullying stopped. Chy said, "My guys, they love me."

Stirred up to love and good works...

Consider the ministries and missions that have been started by this church, consider all the people whose lives have been impacted for the better by this church, you being one of them.

Consider what can be done when we encourage love rather than hate, to make life better for other people; and that you are one of the main ingredients as you are stirred up to be in the mix.

There is a great witness to “taste and see that the Lord is good” that comes from the presence of a healthy church in a hungry world, in a lonely world, in a world in which people are longing for belonging.

John Ortberg calls it a ‘God-designed hunger for community’ which, he says, is ‘why so many of our stories are about our longing to reach community: from *The Odyssey* to Walton’s mountain, from Camelot to Lake Wobegon, from *Mayberry* to *Boyz in the Hood*.’”

And what we have on the menu is the greatest story of the most filling, full-filling, filling-full relationship with God: “Taste and see that the Lord is good!”

Do you hear Jesus rephrasing that psalm when he says in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...”?

He doesn’t say ‘blessed are those who are righteous’, but blessed are those of us who hunger and thirst for this relationship; those of us who have and will continue to have a craving, a powerful desire, a life or death need for a relationship, with God.

And, if we crave this relationship, the promise is that we will be filled. God will fill us, and we won’t be disappointed.

Eugene Petersen in his interpretation of this Beatitude puts it this way, “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s the food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.”

I remember asking a new member once why she wanted to join the church. She said they looked at other churches, but her little girl had come to Vacation Bible School, and her daughter said they needed to go to this church because this is where she fell in love with Jesus.

That's a powerful witness, when we're stirring up that hunger and thirst for righteousness: To hear from each other, stories of how Jesus Christ has been part of our lives, how the Holy Spirit has moved among us, revealing to us the power of God's love.

That the world can see, "There's something here. Not just that they're nice people, but together there is something that is really good, something that I want to be part of, something I want to sink my teeth into, my heart, my soul, my strength, my mind; I want to give my life to it!"

Not only are we the ingredients, but we're also the cooks, to stir up one another, to encourage one another to taste and see that the Lord is good!

I think that's one of the main reasons we need to meet together, as our lesson says, especially when times are tough and people are anxious, like in that upper room at Pentecost.

Jesus was gone. How would they keep going on?

When we gather, I think just like those in that upper room, maybe anxious about what's going to happen, we can hear stories of failure and forgiveness, of success and blessing, stories of grace and mercy, of the assurance of our faith, the confidence we have in the presence and power of Jesus Christ.

We can encourage one another to make life better so that all the world can taste and see that the Lord is good!

At one time I was a cook on an offshore oil rig. I started as a galley hand, dishwasher, and through some circumstances, I became a cook.

I cooked for a crew of about 20-25 men on a production rig; we worked for a week, then another crew came out and we were off for a week. We were about 90 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico, got there by helicopter; the rig stood about 100 feet above the Gulf.

I came out one week, and the foreman asked if I would change shifts with the other cook. He would take my week and I would take his week and cook for that crew. I said OK.

Tuesday was the day we changed shifts. Lunch was already prepared by the other cook, and supper was steaks, so nothing extra special.

Wednesday was the first day to really cook, and I had made lunch and was getting ready to start supper when one of the roustabouts, a worker, came in to the galley.

He asked if I knew what “Gorilla” had done to the other cook. I said, “No”. Gorilla was about 30 years old, just a few years older than me.

He stood about 6 feet, 6-7 inches, 260 or so pounds; aptly named.

What had Gorilla done?

He had come in one day and told the cook that his food was, well, to put it mildly, he didn’t like the food; and Gorilla proceeded to take the food out of the galley and dump it overboard into the Gulf of Mexico.

“Oh,” I said, as I realized why the other cook wanted to change shifts!

That night, after supper, I was back in my room, when there was a knock on the door and in comes Gorilla.

“Bruce,” he says, “glad you’re here.” Now, remember, he’s only about 3 or 4 years older than me, but I said, “Yes, sir, I didn’t mind changing. I’m glad to be on this crew.”

My heart is pounding. He didn’t throw my food overboard; is he going to throw me overboard?

He gets a chair, turns it around, swings his redwood size leg over it, and sits down, “I want to talk to you about supper.”

Silent and desperate prayers were being said!

“You done good, boy! But you need help with your rice.”

“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound... You done good, boy!”

Such words of assurance and encouragement we all need to hear as we come together.

This church has done good, and you want to do more good. So let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works to go into a world hungering for the love of God.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630

www.westminster-church.org