

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC

August 22, 2021

Blueberry Sunday

Berries in the Pie

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Let us pray . . .

My favorite words from our lesson this morning lie in verse 60, When after hearing Jesus talk about eating his flesh and drinking his blood and abiding and living forever, many of his disciples ask, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

I can relate.

Let me begin by saying, I really miss eating my mom's blueberry pies. They were miraculous tasting and since I mostly grew up in Maine, it wasn't unusual for our kitchen to see a blueberry pie on the counter. I never realized what went into them until, once I got a little older, she tried to teach me how to make those pies. More specifically, I should say she tried to teach me how to make *the crust*. The blueberry part was easy.

After sifting out 2 cups of all purpose flour, she added a pinch of salt and then it got complicated.

Now make sure the crisco is cold, she said but not too cold and when you cut the crisco in — she gently and deftly used only the tips of her fingers — do so until it looks the size of peas.

Peas? Do you mean canned peas? Frozen peas? Fresh from the pod peas? And at the tiny end of the pod or the fatter ones in the middle? I was only about 11, what did I know except that there were lots of different forms of peas.

But don't cut it in too much, you can't handle the pastry too much. What's too much?

My stress was building to epic proportions and I hadn't even done anything yet.

After things looked the size of peas, you added the water. I think I remember the range between 1 tablespoon and half a gallon because I did not know this was a weather-dependent culinary event.

You see, you first you had to think about how warm and humid that pastry-making moment was. My mom said if it was warm and humid you added less water than if the day were cooler and dry.

But you couldn't add just any water — you had to add water that had been chilled with an ice cube — in a tea cup. And then you nimbly worked that chilled water, one tablespoon at a time into the flour.

And after barely incorporating the flour and the crisco and the water, you gathered it into a ball — but don't gather it too much — and set it in the fridge — carefully wrapped in Saran Wrap — *for a while*.

It was never clear to me how long “for a while” was.

So after a while, you were to bring the pastry out, unwrap it and plop it down on a flour-dusted counter top “for a bit.” Hmmmmm

As you can imagine, I had my own moment and version of thinking, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?”

And on the rare occasions when I tried making the pastry on my own, it came out a little tough — maybe more like pizza dough. This would have been from handling it too much.

Once it came out in pieces — not enough water even though I'd determined it was a rather humid day.

But my mom's crust? It was divine. So flakey and baked perfectly. She knew what she was doing. So at the end of it all, it seemed to me it was the crust

that gave the pie life. Without a really good one, the flesh of the berries was not complete.

Our lesson this morning made me think about the tradition my mom gave me as I recently reached for a box of Pillsbury ready-made pie crusts. It was the difficulties of making it on my own that kept me from reaching for Crisco and a new bag of flour instead.

Difficulties aren't just located in the little things of life like pie crusts, they are of course part of a faith journey too. Let's take the believers in the Gospel of John's account of Jesus' life and meaning.

John's Gospel addresses a community of Jews who were experiencing difficulties as well — BIG life stuff. They were rejected from the synagogue for believing in the divinity of Jesus. So in order to affirm and comfort them, this Gospel was written with a sort of "insider" and "outsider" language to show them that they are right in understanding who Jesus is.

So when they heard stories like the one from our lesson this morning, they would essentially be nodding and saying yes, yes that's right — we get it, for them the teaching would not be difficult and they would have accepted it. But what had they accepted?

With Jesus presenting himself as the new location of the revelation of God — and therefore replacing the Temple — the Jewish religious authorities found

Jesus' teachings blasphemous. But that didn't stop his followers from being intrigued — and bewildered — by this new way of understanding and experiencing God — A way that taught that you didn't have to somehow prove or otherwise show that you were acceptable to God in the usual Jewish ways with identity markers like only eating certain animals, being circumcised, dining with important people and acts of purity.

Jesus' teachings were unprecedented and must have felt frightening, threatening, exhilarating, hopeful AND extremely difficult to take in and accept.

2,000 years later we know our faith journeys and our understandings can still be difficult. Our Holy Scriptures have been sifted through and handled in a million different ways. They get reinterpreted and wrestled over in all sincerity again and again and again. Sometimes we seem to get it and most of the time not. That's because as the disciples pointed out, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

I'd like to share that the teaching itself isn't actually that difficult. This is John's Jesus and in John, Jesus is understood as God not only dwelling amongst us, but more importantly as God dwelling within us — that's the point of the language of "living" and "abiding" and the really weird "eating" and "drinking" that is used in John. That's what the insiders would have understood.

The point of the language is that these things — God's presence and power — are not time-stamped are not earned and are not somewhere else.

They are eternal and they are here and they are now — and that specifically, we are one with God in one whole perfect confection if you will, filled with a power and presence that you can count on to enjoy and *believe me*, one you can count on to sustain you.

So in return, that's why we come together in worship — to give thanks and remember and testify that we are not left on our own to figure it out. There is an eternal and life-giving presence and a source outside of us and within us, binding us altogether, like flour and Crisco and water . . .

You don't have to sweat the ingredients, the process, the conditions. Those things are a given, God's covered them. Like berries in the pie, just fall into God.

As we begin a new week mostly going through our days in the usual ways, my prayer is that you'll consider that maybe the real difficulty is not what Jesus had to say and live about God, but in accepting those things as a gift.

Always my prayer for you will be that you accept the life-giving gift.

Amen.