



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea

*The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida*

THE ELEVENTH
SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST

AUGUST 4, 2024

A Homily by the Rev. James J. Popham

Years ago we rented a one-room apartment above a garage that bordered the parking lot of a small hotel a block or so south of DuPont circle in Washington, D.C. Two young Iranian brothers had just opened a restaurant in the hotel called the Peacock Bistro. We never knew for sure, but we suspect their family had fled Iran when the shah fled the country in 1979.

Regardless, the Peacock Bistro became our go-to place for dinner, offering good food just a quick walk from our little *pied-a-terre*. And, of course, we got to know Chef Mazier and his brother Shahab, who supervised the front of the house, establishing a relationship that endures to this day. The bistro is long gone, but their current establishment in Georgetown, the Peacock Café, is still thriving, and it has always been our first stop when visiting D.C.¹

Sadly, our last meal with them was during our trip to D.C. for the installation of Michael Curry as presiding bishop in 2015. But we have no doubt that Shahab would remember us and greet us warmly next time we walk in.

What's it all about? Not hunger for food, but hunger for a relationship that has endured for over 30 years. That's the hunger Jesus is speaking to in the reading from the Gospel according to John this morning – not the hunger for

¹ <https://www.peacockcafe.com/>



Jo, Shahab, and our Sara at the Peacock Café, November 3, 2015.

the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life. The hunger for a right relationship with God.

But how could we ever have a relationship with the God who can appear as great and powerful as the Wizard of Oz, at least until Toto pulled back the curtain to expose the merely human manipulator of sight and sound that created only the illusion of power and might.

Of course, our God is no illusion. And intellectually we admit to a God who is so great and powerful as to have created the universe, sustains the universe, and directs the universe.² But, historically – and necessarily –, we have been relegated to defining God in human terms. All we can grasp is the man behind the curtain. That really is the best we can do.

Yet, creating a God in our image is limited, ill-advised, and even perilous. After all, we have been created in God's image, not *vice versa*. And, as humans, our capabilities hardly compare with God's. Except, of course, we have one capability unknown to God. We are capable of evil. So sometimes we can allow ourselves to attribute to God a propensity to violent means to achieve God's ends. Just wander through the Old Testament. How often do humans turn to God to aid and abet them in their violent pursuits of land and treasure and revenge.

What could be more fearsome than a vengeful God of indescribable power and might? That's the God the people always wanted on their side. Jesus first century audience expected just that – a messiah who would vanquish the Roman occupiers and restore Israel as a powerful and prosperous nation.

And that's when God said, "Wait a minute. I better set them straight about who I am and what I am about." And we know how God did it. God sent Jesus to walk among us. Jesus, God incarnate, God as fully human, living among us to show us who God is. And, if we are made in or as the image of God, it shows us who we should be, as well. Because when we enter into a relationship with God, we come to understand what God is like, and our lives can only be informed – and transformed – by that knowledge.

Jesus shows us that God is a God of love and compassion, a God of peace and justice, and, thankfully, a God of mercy. Jesus shows us a loving, liberating, life-giving God. No longer a great and mighty god of vengeance and conquest, but the God who conquers our souls. No longer a god

²See "God the Father," *An Outline of the Faith commonly called the Catechism, Book of Common Prayer* (1979) at

concerned with earthly hungers, but with the hungers of our hearts for the spiritual sustenance only God has provided in Jesus Christ.

So our relationship with God through Jesus is as essential to life as bread itself, as Jesus revealed in calling himself the bread of life.

And in that transformed relationship with God, we leave our fear of God behind. Because we enter into a relationship of love and trust and obedience and forgiveness.

But unlike the bread we break at meals, our relationship with Jesus “endures for eternal life.” Jesus was very clear:

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.³

Our hungry hearts are forever satisfied. Our restless souls finally rest. Could we ask for any more than that?

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³ John 6:___ (NRSV).