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## They Don't Know What They've Got!

Frederick Ludolph

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**Text: John 6:35, 41-51 (B - Pentecost 9)**

The little dialogue box on your service bulletin begins with the words, "More bread passages." Which might raise the question, what to do or say with more bread passages. Three weeks in a row of bread passages! I talked to someone this week who thought perhaps we had accidentally used the same Gospel two weeks in a row! What more can be said about bread? Where does the preacher start when there is yet another bread passage?

Well, we are going to start with Indiana Jones and *The Raiders of the Lost Ark!* I don't know where anyone else is starting with this text, but that's where I'm starting. I suppose now you could be glad you're here this morning, or wishing you were somewhere else, or intrigued by the weirdness of this pastor's mind and willing to stay.

Friday night we watched Indiana Jones and *The Raiders of the Lost Ark*. For the very first time! It's not quite as old as *Star Wars* so you can see how far behind I am in movie watching. It's the plot of the story we're interested in. People who are looking for the ark of the covenant of the Old Testament want it because of priceless objects inside, but also because they believe it may contain a mysterious power. They derive the idea of its power from a few Old Testament stories about people who touched it inappropriately and were killed, as well as from a picture in a book which shows the ark being carried and rays of power emanating from it. Of course, the picture would have to be an artist's conception, probably done by a wood cut process — a print from not too long after the first days of the printing press, at least 2,500 years after the ark had disappeared. Why that artist's drawing would have any authority at all is beyond me, but it is a comic book style of movie. Anyway, they find the ark, the bad guys open it up, it does have special power, the bad guys get killed, the good guys take the ark to

appropriate authorities who swear it is being studied; the person who found it is suspicious and proclaims they don't know what they've got; and the last scene of the movie is of a US Government worker storing the box away in a huge warehouse of other stuff also stored away out of sight and out of mind, too top secret for anyone to touch.

*Raiders of the Lost Ark* is both a caricature and an all too true picture of the human approach to God. God in a box! God in a book—best if it's an old, thick, and obscure book! God in the past! A God of mysterious deadly power that could be accessible if only one could understand the book, find the box, harness the power.

Do you ever read the headlines of the tabloids as you pay for the groceries? How many times have you seen doctored pictures of a mountain in Turkey that is supposed to be a petrified Noah's ark, or pictures of a box that might be the ark of the covenant and headlines about mysterious waves of energy emanating from it which modern science cannot explain? Mysterious pictures of Jesus that do miraculous things; the Holy Grail (the Cup from the Last Supper) which has mysterious powers?

The truth is, we love this stuff! From the hope it offers that there just may be a God after all, to the delicious speculation that the Government is hiding the truth—we love it. And let me give you an example of what it does to us.

I was leading a Confirmation class, trying to get the students to take me through the events and services and stories of Holy Week. I gave them Palm Sunday and asked what happened that day. It took a while for them to come up with Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey to the cheers of the people. I had to give them Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper. After that a young man caught on to the flow of things and took off with the story. "After the Supper Jesus went to the garden and prayed, and Judas came and the soldiers arrested Jesus, and the disciples ran away, and Jesus was crucified." (Now the teachers of the class are feeling good. Someone knows the story. The young man continues.) "Jesus dies on the cross, and Joseph of Arimathea comes..." (that's an impressive detail to know, and now we teachers are feeling really good!) "...Joseph of Arimathea comes with the Holy Grail and gets some of Jesus' blood and the Grail gets lost and Arthur and the knights of the Round Table look for it but they can't find it and then Indiana Jones looks for it and he finds the ark of the covenant..." (the

teachers are shocked and incredulous. We didn't see that hard right turn coming at all!).

Yes, we love this stuff.

And what we end up with is—a powerful Maybe God. But a God whose story we only half know, a God in a box, a God in an old book, a God in mystery, a God long ago or a God far away. A God with great potential to meet our longings and needs but not so close as to get in the way, to ask too much, or to ask anything *real* of us! Tell me: can we expect real fulfillment from a God to whom we will not offer our real and whole selves?

The people of Jesus' day had never seen Indiana Jones nor even dreamed of the possibility of seeing a movie, but they had the same problem we often have. They had a package for God and it didn't look like Jesus. They heard the words from Jesus, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "This is the carpenter's son. We know his father and mother and where he lives. Where does he get this stuff? Who does he think he's fooling?"

They had mentioned that their ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, and Jesus quoted their own words to them. The great thing about manna in the wilderness is that it's part of the story from long, long ago. It's a wonderful story and it's at a safe distance in time. It can mean that God fed the people, not that God feeds people, or that God works through us to feed people, or that God calls us to feed people, or that God is as close as our daily bread, our neighbour, a stranger, our brother or sister, or the estranged family member, or whoever is sitting across the table from us right now.

Jesus, the one who looks like the kid who grew up down the street, is saying that when you look at me, eat with me, listen to me, follow me, imitate me, you are very, very close to God—and God is very close to you.

Jesus is saying, the kingdom of God is within you and among you. God may be revealed in a very old story, but God cannot be contained there. When you share that story with a child or anyone, the kingdom of God and the word of God live in you and are flowing out of you.

Jesus is saying, blessed are you in the poverty of your spirit, or in the depth of your mourning, in the hunger of your heart, in the righteous works of your hand, in the acts of mercy you do, in the pureness of your heart, in the peace you bring to the world; blessed are you here and now in whatever circumstances.

God may come in many packages, in special-looking communion bread, and in ordinary-looking communion bread, but God will never be confined to any one kind of bread. And when blessed and broken and shared God can make a stale hotdog bun shared at your table as living a bread as that shared at the highest altar. Living bread for the world, for your life and my life and the forgiveness of our sins.

You and I look like and indeed are the kids who grew up down the street or around the block, but we as much as any stale hotdog bun are the bread of life, the body of Christ, the people of God built into a temple of living stones for the life of the world. God can be found in us and among us, in the works of our hands and the words of our mouths, but God will not be confined to the work and words of any one of us. God will live in the community we share. A community that searches for and sometimes struggles to know and do the will of God.

Maybe Indiana Jones' statement of incredulity, "They don't know what they've got!" is the statement that brings the Gospel to us. Do we know what we've got in a God who will not be kept in a box, and in a Saviour who is that God, come in a box that looks like you and me, looks like your life and my life, looks like your bread and my bread?

What we have is life, alive and living life, forgiven and forgiving life, creative and abundant life, eternal life. What we have is the real God in our real lives.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Preached at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Kitchener, Ontario, 13 August 2000.

<sup>2</sup> John 6:1-21 (Pentecost 7 / Proper 12); John 6:24-35 (Pentecost 8 / Proper 13); John 6:35, 41-51 (Pentecost 9 / Proper 14).