

“Where is that Easy Button?”

John 6:24-35

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
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They began airing during the holidays last year and were an instant success. Staples’ “Easy Button” commercials have quickly become some of the most popular on television. Each episode depicts a challenging task that appears to have no apparent solution and then someone pushes the “Easy Button.” Immediately the problem is solved. Santa has all the toys needed for Christmas, a student knows the answer to the teacher’s question, a surgeon figures out how to perform a difficult procedure in surgery or a bucking horse is calmed by a cowboy. Each spot ends with someone saying, “Wouldn’t it be nice if there was an easy button for life? Now there is one for your business. Staples—that was easy!”

These commercials have become so popular that Staples now sells “Easy Buttons.” When pushed they utter, “That was easy.” People are placing them on their desks and using them as stress relievers.

It is quite rare to have a commercial that creates a product since their purpose is to promote products. This caught marketers pleasantly by surprise. By the way, the proceeds from the sale of these buttons are donated to the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

Why are these commercials so popular? Perhaps it is because they address a longing in the hearts of most people for life to be easy and problems to be solved quickly.

Isn’t this what the people around Jesus wanted him to do? I think our text supports this.

The crowds around Jesus were swelling and Jesus knew why. He fed over five thousand on a hillside one evening and word of this benevolent deed spread. People were going out of their way to find him because they wanted more free meals. In addition, they had to be wondering, “If he could provide bread, what else could he do? How could he make life easier?” Clearly they were fixated on their own needs.

This began a dialogue between Jesus and many in the crowd that sought him soon after the feeding of the five thousand.

“I tell you the truth, you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.

So they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’ So they asked him, **‘What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?’** Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert for it is written that He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’

Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ **‘Sir,’ they said, ‘from now on give us this bread.’** Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He

who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” John 6:26-35.

This dialogue had to be frustrating for Jesus. He was trying to lead his audience into a discussion about spiritual matters but they kept focusing upon immediate physical needs. It was not that Jesus could be accused of ignoring their physical needs, for he just fed them. However, he wanted to elevate their thoughts and expand their notions of what they needed most and what their neighbors needed from them.

The part of this dialogue that intrigues me centers on their requests in 6:30 and 34. When Jesus encouraged them to believe what he was teaching, they asked, “What sign are you going to give us so that we may see it and believe you?” When Jesus told them he was the bread of life, they responded, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

What do you hear in these requests? **I hear the people asking two things of Jesus, make faith and life easier for us.**

Last week I was on vacation at St. Simons. My daughter, Amy, and I were riding bikes one picture-perfect morning. There was not a cloud in the sky, it was eighty degrees and the path was level as all land on that island is. She looked at me and said, “Why can’t life always be this easy and carefree?” She knew the answer even before she asked it and so do you.

At times, life is tough. It is intimidating, challenging, confusing and unfair. It is filled with risks, danger and peril. All of us fantasize about pushing an Easy Button that can reduce stress and solve problems. The crowds that clamored for Jesus thought they found theirs. “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Did Jesus satisfy their request? Did he make life easier for them? I don’t think so because this was not his intent. The next day, life was as challenging as the previous one.

Then what did Jesus offer them and what did he do for those that listened, believed and followed him? He did not make life easier, however, he made them wiser and stronger.

A young boy found a cocoon and put it on the mantle. A few days later, he saw the cocoon moving and realized the moth turned butterfly was trying to break free. He quickly got a knife and carefully cut the cocoon open so the butterfly could be released from bondage. He was pleased with what he had done until he realized he made a huge mistake. The butterfly was unable to fly because of what he had done. It is in pushing against the walls of the cocoon that the wings of the butterfly are supplied with blood and strengthened so that flight is possible. Without the struggle, the wings do not develop.

Jesus did not come to make life easier, but make us stronger. Life will always be filled with overwhelming challenges but we do not have to face them alone if we place our faith in Christ. The Lord will come and help us confront and deal with life’s greatest challenges.

I appreciated the pastoral prayer voiced by Reverend Sally Lorey that I heard last week when I attended the St. Simons Presbyterian Church. It reminded me of the purpose of our faith. “With you in our lives, dear Lord, there is no wisdom we cannot learn or burden we cannot shoulder.”

The message of this prayer is reinforced by William Willimon’s words, “We need to spend less time asking Jesus why bad things happen to us and open our lives to him so

that he can experience them with us.” I find this comforting and encouraging. It gives me hope and confidence.

Not only did the crowds want Jesus to make life easier, they also wanted him to make faith easier for them. Surely Jesus chuckled when they asked, “What sign are you going to give us so that we may believe you?” He just fed over five thousand people. What more did he need to do for them to believe that he had a special relationship to God and was on a divine mission?

Again Willimon writes, “Sometimes I have heard people say, ‘I wish I could have lived in the first century and witnessed for myself the work of Jesus, actually seen him face to face.’ The implication of this desire is that belief would somehow be easier. You could stand face-to-face with who Jesus was and choose for yourself. But if that were the case, why did more people of that day seem to reject Jesus than follow him?”

Evidently Jesus did not make faith easy enough for them. He refused to pass out Easy Buttons that would give people false hope. Instead, he chose to reveal a faith that was authentic, accessible and helpful. It was his desire to share a faith that would make his disciples wiser so they could make responsible decisions, stronger so they could be more resilient and bolder so they could create a community of justice and peace for all.

This was the kind of faith Jesus needed. I do, too, and am grateful for his example and influence.

Is this the kind of faith you have? Do you have a faith that makes you wiser and stronger? Do you have a faith that helps you deal with life’s complexities and challenges? Do you have a faith that gives you confidence and hope? Do you have a faith that motivates and empowers you to create a community of justice and peace?

You can if you will open your heart to Christ and allow him to experience life with you. What a difference he will make on your journey. “With him there is no wisdom you cannot learn or burden you cannot shoulder.”