

Sermon for August 15, 2021

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We have been spending these past three weeks in the Gospel of John in the section of scripture titled the Bread Of Life Discourse, or as theologian Caroline Lewis refers to them, the B.O.L.D texts. These are scripture texts in which Jesus makes the BOLD proclamation that he is the bread from heaven, the bread that gives life to the world.

In today's scripture amidst dispute Jesus makes a particularly bold proclamation "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them."

Take and eat flesh and drink blood. This can be a semi-creepy text as it sounds a little cannibalistic or vampirish. For those of you who remember High School English class, it brings me to thoughts of the book "The Lord of the Flies" and the character Piggy. Or to previews of those super scary horror films that I will never go to watch in theaters. This is Christianity? We are to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood? This is especially interesting when you consider that the Gospel of John does not include the story of the Last Supper with the words we hear at communion like the other gospels. Jesus is not saying these words as he passes around the bread and wine. Why does Jesus say this? What does it mean?

First off it helps to understand that the Gospel of John is a gospel of images, theology and mystery. This is the only one of the four gospels that has Jesus sharing seven "I AM" statements and images. I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the vine, etc." Therefore it takes a little digging into the texts to explore Jesus' words.

To explore today's text we have to go back to the beginning of the Gospel of John, to the very first chapter, to scripture verses we often hear at Christmas, to begin to understand. John 1 starts "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being." Let's start there. The Word was with God in the beginning, the Word was God, and all things came into being through the Word. Then only a few verses later we read "And the Word became **flesh** and lived among us." We know this Word made flesh that dwelt among us is Jesus. Therefore this Word that was in the beginning, the Word that was with God, the Word that was God, the Word through which all things came into being IS this Word made flesh – IS Jesus.

It is this Word made flesh that Jesus tells us to eat. We are to eat, to consume, to take in the Word of God, the source of life, God's very self which has always been and will always be. How does one eat such Word, such flesh?

The first chapter of John continues "...to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh, or the will of man but of God."

It is not by our own flesh or blood or will that we have life. It is not by our own ability that we eat. The text reads "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power." To eat is to be fed, to receive Jesus, to believe that God alone, the Word made flesh, is the bread from heaven, the source of all life.

Picture young children eating a meal. They have no ability to cook or provide for themselves. They are dependent on what is set on the highchair tray or delivered by spoon to their lips. To eat is to open wide and receive what is given. When my son Brayden was very little he would audibly celebrate each bite with a little dance, "Ummmmm....." Before that bite had been fully swallowed he would spread his lips wide again and anxiously await the next bite. We laughed at his urgency and elation at each bite he was given. He seemed to have a sense that his life was dependent on those bites and he found joy in receiving each spoonful.

Is this an image for us as people called to eat and drink the Word made flesh? Are we aware of our dependence on Jesus, the source of all life? Do we anxiously await our next bite, the opportunity to be fed once again by the Word? Do we audibly celebrate with thanksgiving that which has been given for us to have life?

John 1 ends "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a Father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."

Today as we gather outside, in this green beside these still waters, we are reminded that all things came into being through the Word and that this Word made flesh came to bring life to the fullness of the world. We hear the words of Ephesians calling us to "give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything" and we look around us with fresh eyes and give thanks for the abundant life that the Word brings into being.

In this moment that God "makes us to lie down in green pastures and leads us beside still waters" let us once again recognize that all things come into being through him and in this fullness we know God's grace upon grace, God's goodness and mercy that follows us all the days of our lives.

Today we will once again share in the gift of Holy Communion. We will eat the bread and hear the words "Body of Christ given for you." We will drink the wine and hear "Blood of Christ shed for you." We will remember Jesus' BOLD words "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will have eternal life; abide in me and I in them." Let us open wide, receive and believe in the Word of God, the source of all life. Let us do a little dance and with an audible "ummmm" anxiously anticipate each opportunity to be fed.