

My Mind is Made Up, I am What I Eat!

12 Pentecost B Aug 15, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

Gospel: John 6:51-58

In John's gospel, the feeding of the 5,000 leads to extended teaching in which Jesus identifies himself as the true "bread of life." Finally, here, he makes a connection that would not be understood until after his death, in light of the church's celebration of holy communion.

[Jesus said,] ⁵¹"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; & the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

⁵²The Judeans then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son-of-Man & drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh & drink my blood have eternal life, & I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food & my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh & drink my blood abide in me, & I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, & I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, & they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

Overview

Today Jesus invites us to a meal. It is an extraordinary invitation to do an ordinary thing: form bonds of love & community through shared food & drink. Jesus' invitation to share in the meal of his body & blood teaches us about the breadth & depth of God's love & about God's desire for us to abide in that love (John 6:56). Jesus' audience asks a reasonable question: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). Jesus' answer doesn't really address the question; instead, he reiterates that he is the true bread from heaven, the true source of eternal life. This must have been off-putting to his listeners. Eat flesh? Drink blood? & yet, here we find a profoundly grace-filled invitation—abide in me—and a promise: through this meal I abide in you. We're invited to not only join Jesus at the table, but to be at home in the love of God, knowing that Christ makes his home in our hearts & lives too.

Video

Jesus says, “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51). How do we receive such a gift? A YouTube lecture titled [“Theology of the Unconditional,”](#) theologian John Caputo describes our difficulties accepting a gift without expectation of return, which is just the kind of gift Jesus offers today. Starting at 16:45 Caputo gives examples of how we typically respond to unconditional gifts. How might our participation in the truly free gift of holy communion—and of true life in Christ—be different?

Theological Reflection - Movie

In his homily [“Christification of the Universe,”](#) Richard Rohr reflects on how the “bread that comes down from heaven” is a metaphor for the presence of Christ in the entire cosmos. In *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (Disney, 2017), Luke Skywalker demonstrates to his student Rey that “The Force” is the property of no institution, religion, or creed. How can our faith point to the universal love of God in Christ that is beyond the limitations of rituals or doctrines?

Connections with Creation

Christ used the metaphors of eating his flesh & drinking his blood to emphasize that his followers must take on his life. We believe that Christ’s healing presence is manifested in the natural elements of the meal, the bread & wine. The elements are unchanged, but they convey Christ to us & exemplify God’s presence in all things. Martin Luther wrote: “God is substantially present everywhere, in & through all creatures, in all parts & places, so that the world is full of God & He fills all”. How does receiving these earthly elements with all your senses connect you to God, the Christian community & also creation “in all parts & places”?

[John 6:51-58](#)

There is considerable dispute among scholars concerning this passage. Some scholars argue for its historicity: since neither Hebrew nor Aramaic has the noun “body” that appears in the synoptic accounts of the last supper, John’s vocabulary might be closer to what Jesus actually said at some such meal. Others argue the opposite: John is composing Christian polemic against the group he calls “the Jews,” who would have been scandalized by the idea of drinking blood. The passage does, however, accord

with John's over-the-top metaphoric style. The natural fact celebrated by John's graphic vocabulary is that we all live off the life of others, from our mother's milk to the flesh of dead animals. So, for John, the bread & wine are the very life of the Christ, whose death gives us life. When we eat the food of holy communion (the verb in v. 53 connotes "munch"), we ingest the life of Christ. Christians have executed each other over acceptable language with which to explain the mystery of the sacrament. While we refrain from such polemic, we are called to try our best to give contemporary synonyms for the meaning of this meal. We are what we eat: in this meal, we together eat Christ, & so become his body in the world.

In [20:30-31](#), John tells us the purpose of the book: that we may believe in Jesus as Christ or Messiah. Thus far, Jesus has emphasized *belief* in him as divine & as *living bread*. But now he speaks of a *reality*. For John, the context is the Church. In v. [51](#), Jesus says: "the living bread ... that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh"; "whoever eats of this flesh will live forever". This is how God will save the world: see [3:16-17](#). Jesus became flesh ([1:14](#)), i.e. assumed complete human nature. He offered himself to God in death, thus giving life, available to all. "The Jews" (v. [52](#), possibly some Jewish Christians) take him literally; that to *eat someone's flesh* was a Semitic figure of speech for to *slander* did not make Jesus' statement easier to understand! Then v. [53](#): the only way to salvation ("life") is through "eat[ing] the flesh ... & drink[ing] his blood", i.e. just believing in Christ is insufficient. Sharing in the Eucharist provides "eternal life" (v. [54](#)) & resurrection – to union with God. Why? Because it requires faith, trust, that the flesh & the blood are "true" (v. [55](#)), real – the ultimate reality. It is through sharing in the Eucharist that we are joined to Christ. Note the word "abide" (v. [56](#)): it involves *remaining in a relationship*. Believers *dwell in Christ*, & he in them, through participating in the Eucharist. Then v. [58](#): both the Eucharist (Christ) & manna "came down from heaven", but while manna nourished for a finite time, sharing in the Eucharist is the key to surviving the judgement at the end of time.

The 4th Gospel is sometimes called the Gospel of Life: "life" occurs 36 times in John & 16 times in the Synoptics. "Life" & "live" occur 17 times in the NRSV of the Bread Discourse. For John, eternal life is not something that God gives to us in the "next" life. Rather, it is something we experience in this life, though it is not determined by the natural life.

(Thx to WorkingPreacher.org; Sundays&Seasons.com; montreal.anglican.org)

- In the ancient tale – which dog do you feed most often? Can you identify what is occurring inside of you when you “choose” to feed either one? Can you slow this down & train yourself to feed the one you are truly called to feed? Faith is not about only feeding the “right” one all the time but being led & grown by God’s Spirit to feed the one and by forgiveness and love retrain the other. As a Child of God, how are you being fed by God’s presence regularly? What is needed more in YOUR spiritual diet? How can you get this?