

Pentecost 12-B
8/19/12 CTK

John 6:51-58

All this talk about bread started when Jesus fed those five thousand people.

A few ago I argued that this miracle was, first of all, a sign that Jesus really did literally come to feed hungry people. That was part of what he meant when he said “I am bread of life.” Jesus didn’t then and doesn’t now want people to go hungry. He came to work miracles if necessary in us and through us to make sure that people aren’t starving in a world where there really is plenty to go around. If only we can find the will and ways to share it. We know that. Through us, God can feed the world.

And then, with Mary’s and Athena’s help, over the past couple of weeks, we talked some more about how it was not just literal bread that Jesus wants us to have, but spiritual food too. That Jesus is also talking about the Eucharist very directly to his first followers and to us. It’s the Lord’s supper which creates a community of faith out of us. Jesus is the meal. In, with and under the meal, as Brother Martin said. We take Jesus into ourselves, and that’s how we become the body of Christ together in the world. Or at least that’s one of the ways. We are what we eat.

So, we are spiritually and physically fed by Jesus, who is the bread of life. And we offer that to the world.

I don’t know if you’ve noticed the couple that sits out by the P.O. on the corner of parking lot across from Rush’s. They’ve been there for at least a few months. He sits in a wheelchair with an umbrella over it, she us usually standing holding a cardboard sign saying “homeless veteran.” Obviously they are hungry. We have some Aldi’s gift cards that we bought for a ministry before the pandemic and I still have a few left that I carry in my carry so when I can pull over I give them one or two and they are always very grateful – they know where the store is and can get over there to buy some food. Each time I wish them God’s blessing and they wish a blessing on me, this is a little sacrament we have. They feel blessed, and so do I. It’s bread from heaven even if we don’t say the formal words of institution over it. The church is privileged to do that in Jesus’ name - to share physical and spiritual food. The bread from heaven.

But then there's more. Today, this week, Jesus pushes even further this idea about eating him, taking him into us when he talks about having to eat his flesh and drink his blood. He goes on and on about, to where it's even a little queasy. "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you." This I would not necessarily say to the homeless veteran who needed help.

"This is too difficult" "who can accept this?" is what many of Jesus followers said at the time and many of them quit and left and didn't go around with him anymore John tells us. He's getting too radical. Too hard to understand.

And let's be honest: we walk away from Jesus when he gets to radical too, when he demands too much from us and starts saying wacky things. This is too hard, we say. He can't mean it. Give to everyone who asks of you. Or when he says we have to love our neighbor, well, Ok, but then even to love our enemies, pray for the ones who hates us. Turning the other cheek. This is all fine in principle but in flesh and blood situations it gets a little gnarly. Or, don't be afraid. We thrive on being afraid – afraid of "the other," and "the stranger." The world feeds us that fear.

We can agree in principal in what Jesus stands for, but all this talk about flesh and blood forces us to remember that Jesus is a human being not a principle. He lived a real flesh and blood life and died a very flesh and blood death on the cross. And he was resurrected in flesh and blood, that's why he shows his disciples the fresh wounds his hands and side when he appears to them on Easter. He is alive in flesh and blood, the living Christ is incarnate. In us.

I've said before, but I find it very telling that the word Jesus uses when he says "eat my flesh" he starts out using *phago* like "esophagus" which means to swallow down your throat; then as he gets deeper into his teaching he starts to use *trogo* which is related to the word "trauma" it means to chew, munch; to gnaw on, the way a dog gnaws a bone. Or even to ruminate on the way a cow chews its cud – keeps chewing it to get everything out of it; swallows it but it comes back again and has to be chewed on a little more.

So that's how life with Jesus is, we should be warned. If nothing in the life of faith is ever very easy, well, he warned us – this is going to take some chewing. If nothing melts in our mouths like filet mignon, if there's always gnawing on it as if on a bone we can't drop, well Jesus already told us. If you've ever been to a church council or ministry team meeting you know what I mean. There's a lot of bone gnawing and crunching and grinding away going on at those meetings. That's the only way to get to the marrow. That's how we are nourished, how we get his life in us.

Jesus is a sinewy tough sun-dried street preacher who walked everywhere, slept where he could and ate what he was given. He was no soft-skinned dispenser of easy religious platitudes. And he asked the same of his followers. Sent them out with no cloak, no bag no staff. Just go do it in my name he told them.

Chew on this, he seems to say after he has thrown out some of his toughest parables and most grisly commands: leave all the 99 sheep for the sake of one lost one; judge not lest you be judged.

And so when we leave here today, or any Sunday after being fed on word and sacrament, and it seems like something is a little stuck in our craw, let's try to chew on it a little more. Maybe that's what it takes so we can really get at the nourishment for it can flow in our blood and into our flesh so that every cell and molecule in us can soak up the good news of hope and forgiveness. Keep chewing and munching and gnawing so some of that good heavenly food can strengthen us for the life of faith.