

**Being the Body:
August 15, 2021**

One Sunday morning...
A minister decided that
A visual demonstration
Would add special emphasis
To his sermon.

So he took four worms [**1 Worms**]
And placed them into four separate jars:

The first worm was put into a container of alcohol...
Straight whiskey.

The second worm was put into a container of cigarette smoke.
Which he just allowed to waft into the jar.

The third worm was put into a container of chocolate syrup.

The fourth worm was ! put into a container of good clean soil.

At the conclusion of the sermon...
Which was all about...
How temperance...
And how people should live...
A good pure life.

At the conclusion...
Of this pulpit thumping sermon...
The Minister reported the results:

The first worm in alcohol... was Dead.
The second worm in cigarette smoke... was Dead.
Third worm in chocolate syrup... was Dead.
Fourth worm in good clean soil... was Alive.

So the Minister asked the congregation -
What did you learn from this demonstration?

A woman in the back quickly raised her hand and said,
"As long as you drink, smoke or eat chocolate,
You won't have worms!"

I'm going to say something today...
That I have never said before...
And I doubt I'll ever say again...

I feel sorry for those Jewish leaders...
In the gospel lesson...
Who did not understand...
What Jesus was saying.

They thought he was literally saying...
If they want to life within them...
That leads all the way...
To eternal life...

Then they have to...
Eat his body...
And drink his blood.

Which was weird...
And hard to understand.

It reminds me of that old camp song... **[2 Camp Song]**
That we used to sing...
Back in the 80's...

Sons of God...
Hear God's Holy Word...
Gather round...
The table of the Lord...
Eat his body...
Drink his blood...
As we sing this song of love...
Allelu-allelu-allelu-alleluia.

I always thought...
If people who didn't know...
Were lost in the woods...
And came up on a group of people...
Singing that song...
Dancing around a campfire...

It most certainly would sound...
Cannibalistic... and gross...
And probably a little terrifying...
If you didn't know anything about...
Christianity.

The Jewish people...
In the gospel lesson...
Did not know about Christianity... **[3 Misunderstood]**

Remember that Jesus... who was Jewish...
Was just then... teaching the foundations of his faith...
Which was different than what they had known.

And to their credit...
They were trying to understand...
What Jesus was saying...

But they were missing the point...
They were focusing on the exact words...
He was saying...

And the not the spirit...
Or the meaning...
Of the ideas he was presenting.

Therefore... they couldn't or wouldn't take part...
In the offer he was making...
The couldn't accept him... because...
It didn't make sense.

So just out of curiosity...
Do you understand???
What does Jesus mean...
What do you all think...
Jesus was trying to tell us?

Let me read it again... **[4 Bread of Life]**
Just in case you missed it...
Here are the highlights of the gospel lesson.
John 6:51-58.

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

Very truly, I tell you, 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,
And I will raise them up on the last day;
for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me,
and I in them.
Just as the living Father sent me,
And I live because of the Father,
So whoever eats me will live because of me.

Ok. What IS Jesus saying?

[WAIT FOR IT....]

Is it just communion?
Is that just the new way...
that we take Jesus... literally....
That his body during communion...
And his blood during communion...
Have the power...
To give us life...

Or are we missing...
The heart of what he's saying?

I mean... you all know...

The idea of the Body of Christ...
Is bigger than just the elements...
Of Holy Communion.

This is bigger than bread. This is bigger than wine.

That last verse... **[5 Living In Jesus]**
Talks about if you eat his body...
If you drink his blood...
YOU ABIDE IN HIM.
JUST LIKE HE ABIDES IN THE FATHER.

And in that relationship...
There is life.
That's where life is found.

God is the living God.
Jesus lives because of his relationship with God.
We live because of relationship with Jesus.

That's what the Word says.

All this crazy talk...
About body and blood...
And eating and drinking...
Is REALLY about being connected...
To Jesus.

It's about being connected...
To God.

It's about being connected...
To each other.

It's about being connected...
To all the people...
Who have believed in Christ...
Who have died... and gone ahead of us.

When we eat his body...
And drink his blood...
We are in communion...

We are connected to everyone...
Who has eaten his body...
To everyone who has drank his blood.

For the past 2000 years...
People have said these same words...
And gathered at this table...
People have come together...
To worship the Lord of Life.
The Living God.

And more than likely...
2000 years from now...
People will still gather...
To eat and drink...
And be connected.

No wonder it was hard to understand.
Because it was happening on two...
Very distinct levels of comprehension. **[6 God Speaks]**

There were the human words...
That were being spoken.

And there was the power of God...
That was working behind the words.
And doing something bigger...
Than what was being said.

Does that make sense?

We do it all the time...
In the church.

This candle... it's just a candle... right?
We fill it with oil when it gets empty.
We light it... and it shines...
Just like every other candle.

But it has meaning.
It is the Christ Candle...
The Paschal Candle.

It represents... Christ's present in our midst.
It's a way for us to celebrate and recognize...
Really important days in the church...
Christmas... Easter... Funerals... Baptisms...

And speaking of baptisms...

When we baptize someone...
The water... the element...
It doesn't really do anything...
But the Word of God...
Is at work...
In with and under...
The water.

So this common element...
Has two meanings...
It's water that we use to wash...
But more importantly...

It is a promise of God...
Poured out on us.

And even when we say good morning...
To each other...
That has to do...
With the Body of Christ.

It has two meanings.

We aren't just saying...
Hey. How you doing?
I hope you have a good day...

No. When we shake hands...
Or say good morning...
Or pass the peace...

The power of God...
That lives... within our community...
Is shared through the common love...
And the greetings...
And the fellowship...
And the acts of service...
And the acts of kindness...
And the care and concern...
We genuinely have for each other.

And by the way...
Christ also reminds us...
That the power of God...
Lives out there...
Beyond these doors.
In this world.

And power of God...
Ought to compel us...
To live by those same...
Christians values and virtues...
Toward people in this world...

Remember Jesus said...
Big deal... if you love people who love you...
Even people who don't believe can do that...
But you... follower of Christ...
Love your enemies.

So what I'm saying is...
We live simultaneously...
On two planes of existence.

We live in our mundane common lives...
But when Christ entered in...

When he became one of us...
When he put on human flesh...

He made more... in with and under...
Our common mundane existence...

He declared it holy.
Precious to God.
Worth something.
And good.

So... we have to have eyes to see...
And ears to hear.
Because God...
Is in with and under us...
As we live our mundane holy lives.

So. I have this little habit... or tradition...
Not sure what to call it. **[7 Crumpled Dollar]**
But I carry wrinkled crumpled up...
One dollar bills...
And I stash them places.

I have one in the visor of my car.
Stuffed under the clip.

I have one in my wallet...
And it's not in good shape...
But I have it ready to go.

The reason I carry a dollar here...
And a dollar there...
Is because...
You NEVER know...
When you're going to come across...
A lemonade stand.

And I have kind of a commitment...
To buy a little cup of lemonade...
Whenever I pass a stand...
And I haven't been very good at it lately...
But... it's important to me.

Because it reminds me...
That God is with us.
And God is moving in ways...
That we may not always understand.

Let me explain.

You know how Lindsey and Pastor Ryan...
Are getting ready for the National Youth Gathering...
That's going to be held in Minneapolis...

Well... way back in 2012... **[8 Youth Gathering]**
When I was a pastor at Good Shepherd in Madison Wisconsin...
We took a bus load of high school kids...
To that youth gathering.
It was held in New Orleans that year.

We have some great stories...
About how I ran all around downtown New Orleans...
In a torrential downpour...
To buy all the big garbage bags...
From every convenience store...

So that we could walk a couple miles in the rain...
To get to our dinner reservation.
We cut a hole in the bag for our faces...
And hooked them over our ears...
And I have a really cute picture of Ms. Janet...
Looked like... well if an Oompa Loompa...
And a California Raisin... had a baby.

Wisdom tells me...
I should never share that photo!!!

One morning we were having a meeting...
In the lobby of our hotel.
This was the day of our service/education project. **[9 Ninth Ward]**
We were going down to the 9th ward...
The area that was hardest hit...
By Hurricane Katrina.

We were going to work...
And see the sights...
But also... I told the kids...
This was about our relationship with God.
And the people we met...

I told them... to ask questions...
And talk to the adults we met...
Who were teaching us what happened...
And ask them about how God was moving...
And working in New Orleans.

Don't be afraid to talk and listen.

Then I stepped aside...
And let Sarah, our Youth Director...
Make some announcements about how this was going to work.
We were going to get on the bus,
Go to the 9th Ward,
Pick up a local pastor,
And then that pastor was going to give us a tour.

While Sarah was explaining all of this.
She liked to talk... a lot...
But while she was explaining...

All of a sudden...
I had a weird thought
Co me into his head.

Now, this is not an uncommon occurrence...
I have a lot of weird thoughts...
But usually I have enough common sense...
Not to say what I'm thinking!

But this need to say something...
Was growing inside of me...
And it was on the verge of urgent.

So, when Sarah was done with her announcements
I jumped in and said, "One more thing..."

Whenever you see kids with a lemonade stand
You should always stop and buy some...
Even if you don't want the lemonade...
Because it doesn't cost you very much,
But it means a lot to the kids."

And everyone in the group...
Youth and adults...
Just looked at me like...

"O.k... huh... well... thanks for that Pastor Rod...
Whatever the heck that means.

I felt awkward...
Because I had no idea...
Why I had to say those words.
It didn't make sense.
I didn't understand. They didn't understand.
I just knew... I was supposed to say it.

We all got on the bus...
And drove to the 9th Ward.
Remember this place had been destroyed...
And the people had dealt with complete devastation.
It was heart-breaking.

When we stopped at the place
Where we were picking up the pastor.
All of sudden
One of the kids pointed out the window and yelled,
"Pastor Rod! Look!"

And right there... in the 9th ward... surrounded by all this disaster...
Right where the bus stopped...

Were two little girls with a lemonade stand.
Of course the kids on the bus...
All got up and wanted to go out.
To buy some lemonade...

But just then, Sarah,
The mean old Youth Director said to me,
"DO NOT let the kids off the bus!
We don't have time for this....
It will take forever to get everyone back on
And they don't have enough lemonade for all of us, anyway!"

So I told them they had to stay on the bus. **[10 Who Dat Bus]**
And there was a big groan...
On the verge of a major revolt...

Then one of the boys said,
"Well, can't we at least give them the money?!"
I said... yes.

We passed around a plastic ziploc bag...
For youth to put money in.
And they weren't just putting in ones...
They were putting in 5's and 10's and 20's.
The bag was stuffed full of money

I took it out and handed it to the little girls.
And said, "This is for you."
She looked at it and said, "All of it?!"
I said, "Yep. Can I have a glass of lemonade, please?"

She gave Rod a glass of lemonade.
Rod took it onto the bus and he said to everyone,
"This is your communion today.
I'm going to pass this cup around
And I want everyone to take a sip

And I want you to remember what happened today...
Remember how God works in ways we don't understand...
Remember how God works through this world.

This is the body of Christ... given for you. **[11 Being the Body]**

Lemonade can be the body of Christ.
Water can be the body of Christ.
Bread can be the body of Christ.

And best of all...
You can be the body of Christ.

If you eat his body.
If you drink his blood.
If you live in him.

You will live.
And then... with renewed faith...
Renewed faith.
Renewed love.

You will bring life...
To this tired old world.

Thanks be to God!
Amen!