

SERMON 11th Sunday of Pentecost Aug 8, 2021

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“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Did you hear that in the Gospel? Never hungry Never thirsty.

The incarnate Word of God is bread. It’s easy to miss it, don’t you think? To confuse the Word with all those words in the Bible. When the Word is so much more. And the bread of life, the bread of communion, is so much more than simply a symbol of forgiveness or a metaphor for Christ’s resurrection. God doesn’t just want to teach us how to live. God wants to feed us. At the deepest level.

When I was growing up in the Anglican church Holy Communion, as we called it then, was a fact of life. But nobody ever talked about it. No-one ever used the word metaphor to speak of the bread. Nobody ever argued about whether we were talking metaphor or the real thing. Nobody ever said - exactly what is this anyway? We just didn’t talk about it.

So you know I became kind of sceptical. Wary. *You* remember being a teenager. Wanting everything to make sense. Be logical. Rational. Remember taking stuff literally? We were very good at taking stuff literally back then, right! And whatever ‘sense’ your parents might try to share with you - well forget that - what did *they* know! (I’m not sure which is harder - being a teenager or being the parent of a teenager!)

Eventually I left the church. And then, eventually, I came back to the church. And like a few others, I brought some baggage with me, some old beliefs. Some old, out-of-date beliefs, out-of-date with who I had become in the decades since. So, still functioning on my teenage beliefs but blissfully oblivious to that being so, I avoided the Eucharist. In fact I only attended Evening Prayer which pretty neatly solved the problem of Eucharist!

But you know our God, is infinitely clever, sometimes quite devious, and loves a good joke. So back then God first changes my mind about coming to Eucharist *like this...* My dear friend Horatio, who is also Anglican, tells me that at church no-one sits next to him. I imagine people are being racist because he’s Chinese. And I’m outraged because he’s my dear friend and he’s one of the loveliest people I know. I can’t bear the thought of him sitting alone. So I start going to the main service with him. BUT I do not go up for communion. He goes up and I wait in the pew. And God sees that further steps are needed...

My god-children come to visit and they always want to do everything I do. So they come to church with me. And I don't want to bias them either for or against communion. So I give them an explanation and suggest they choose what's right for them. They want to know what I'll be doing. Not going up? Ok, they're not going either. So that's that. But as we sit waiting for 750 people to go and return from communion the thought zips through my mind, just for a second, that if communion is what I just told them - couldn't I go up??? And then one of them asks me another question and I lose track of that thought! And later, after the service I can't remember what I told them. Dang!

So I go to see one of the priests I felt safe with, Marianne, and ask her to tell me what exactly is Communion. And she responds

"So you want to know what you're being asked to swallow here. Quite literally!"

And I think, yeah, that's it! What is this substance *and* what is the belief I'd be swallowing... And she says,

"Well communion is food for the journey lest the journey be too hard. And the journey is too hard for all of us some of the time." She pauses, smiles at me, and continues *"So why don't you sit with that & let me know how it goes..."* And I walk away thinking - *food for the journey.. lest the journey be too hard...*

You know, she was quoting our reading from 1 Kings this morning where Elijah is fleeing for his life and an angel brings him food and says, *"eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you"* I ponder on this all week.

The following Sunday, when it's time for communion I find myself going up there. I just do. I receive the bread and wine from Marianne and then for the whole rest of the service I sit in the pew with tears pouring down my face. When I see her at the end of the service she asks "How was that for you? I was so surprised to see you coming up I didn't even say your name." I tell her how I cried for the rest of the service and she exclaims *"Oh good!!"* Which puzzles me at first. But later I understand - she saw my tears as evidence of how deeply I've been moved by the experience. God has leaned over and touched my heart. In spite of all my resistance. Cause our God is a very determined God! And... as I mentioned earlier, God is infinitely clever, sometimes quite devious, and loves a good joke

I believe we all want this bread. We might not let on to ourselves about that but I know there is in every human heart a deep hunger for closeness with God, a yearning to feel God's love surrounding us, making us whole, uniting us to the Holy of Holies, and thus through God to each other - separated no more.

Such grace! And so terrifying! And yet... it is indeed what we continually hunger for, especially when we refuse to acknowledge it. Especially... when our confusion or our egos or our belief in how things *should* be get in our way. When those things cloud

our perceptions and portray the world as meaner or uglier or more unfair than we were expecting. When people fail to live up to our expectations or fail to read our minds or fail to express love towards us in the way we really want them to.

Right? Cause think about it... What do the people who are following Jesus say? Remember from last week? “What sign are you going to give us so we may see it and believe you??” Wait! Are you serious!?! This man has been healing those who no-one else could. This man is teaching to you from the Torah in ways which move your heart more powerfully than you thought was even possible. This man has shown you in the most vivid of ways that every single one of you matters - he has broken the laws and put not tradition but people first. He has included the most marginalized of you. The crowds grow daily as more and more people seek out what he is offering and you are asking for signs!????!!!

This is the one who loves us and shows us how to love. Then and now. When we were children we used to sing “Jesus loves me, this I know, cause the Bible tells me so.” And now we know how Jesus loves us, how God loves us, not only from the Bible but from the abundance of creation, from the blessings that fill our lives, from the miracle of being alive in a human body. We know how God loves us from friends and family, from beauty and music and gardens and food and a million other things. The Bread of Life is everywhere. Hearts overflowing, right! Praise to the Maker!

AMEN