



The Feast of Corpus Christi St. James Church 2018

John 6:51-58

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.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “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. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Growing up in the Southern United States I was often told not to look directly at the sun. This was hard for me, a mischievous young girl who delighted in doing what she was told not to do. And, then, of course, there was the omnipresence of the sun in our lives. It beat down upon us constantly, heating us, lighting our way even if we had to squint to see, and tanning our bodies. The sun—an undeniable presence we both relished and sought to escape. The sun, the one thing we were told not to look at directly, for its burning power could destroy our ability to see, and the one thing, in its magnificence and splendor, that we wanted to look into.

This is a bit about how I feel as I think about the Feast of Corpus Christi—as if I’m trying to look upon something so large, so central to life, so splendid, so magnificent that it might overwhelm me.

For who of us can fully fathom Jesus as the one whose divinity becomes irrevocably intertwined with his and our humanity through his living a fully human bodily life and dying a fully human bodily death? Who of us can fathom that all that is holy, all that is true, all that is saving has appeared in the midst of us and calls us to make the same present here and now? Who of us can fathom that the broken bread and wine poured out that we consume in the Eucharist are not only the means of our communion with God but are emblematic of the life we too are to live in and for the world?

We see this same unfathomable quality expressed as confusion in the reading from the 6th Chapter of John for today. Jesus is speaking of himself as the living bread whose flesh and blood his own are to take into themselves. His detractors who are listening in are aghast at what seems to be a man suggesting that his followers engage in cannibalism. Undaunted, Jesus goes on to assert that eating him as living bread, drinking his spilled blood will not only unite people to him but will be a food and drink that leads to eternal life—a life with a quality and power that transcends normal limitations.

And, this, of course is another dimension of this Feast Day. For while this day's focus is on giving thanks for the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, tonight's celebration of the life of God made available to us in Body and Blood of Christ is a part of the larger sacramental picture that is at the center of a life with a quality and power that transcends normal limitations. For heaven is found in the ordinary, all matter mediates our God: Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. And on account of this, you and I have been invited into a life infused with delight and replete with responsibility, a world worthy of savoring and a world worthy of giving up our lives in order to save. This is the large, imposing, golden sun we are peeping at tonight. We do this in fear and trembling; we do this in ecstasy and gratitude, for its implications are profound for us.

For it means that God's gracious presence is inescapable. There is no place God has not occupied. There is no history that God has not lived. There is no destination to which God has not traveled before us. And it means that the pattern of being taken, broken, blessed and given as the bread and wine are, has become the pattern of our lives, has become that which gives us a life that we would call eternal.

Evelyn Underhill wrote a most amazing and terrifying poem about this entitled (what else?) *Corpus Christi*. In it we hear that in Christ there is splendor burning in the heart of things and that, fed by the living bread, we are to offer our lives as he did.

Corpus Christi **By Evelyn Underhill**

COME, dear Heart!

The fields are white to harvest: come and see

As in a glass the timeless mystery

Of love, whereby we feed

On God, our bread indeed.

5

Torn by the sickles, see him share the smart

Of travailing Creation: maimed, despised,

Yet by his lovers the more dearly prized

Because for us he lays his beauty down—

Last toll paid by Perfection for our loss!

10

Trace on these fields his everlasting Cross,

And o'er the stricken sheaves the Immortal Victim's crown.

From far horizons came a Voice that said,

'Lo! from the hand of Death take thou thy daily bread.'

Then I, awakening, saw
A splendour burning in the heart of things:
The flame of living love which lights the law
Of mystic death that works the mystic birth.
I knew the patient passion of the earth,
Maternal, everlasting, whence there springs
The Bread of Angels and the life of man.

15

Now in each blade
I, blind no longer, see
The glory of God's growth: know it to be
An earnest of the Immemorial Plan.
Yea, I have understood
How all things are one great oblation made:
He on our altars, we on the world's rood.
Even as this corn,
Earth-born,
We are snatched from the sod;
Reaped, ground to grist...
In the Mills of God,
And offered at Life's hands, a living Eucharist.
living a Eucharistic life.

20

25 Tonight let's be bold. Let's look
directly into the splendor
burning in the heart of things—
Christ Jesus in the flesh. Let's
turn our gaze toward the
magnificence and beauty of a
30 God who loves us enough to
live our lives, who offers us
food in his body broken and his
blood poured out for all and
who calls us to join him in

