

Pentecost 13B (8/19/2018)

Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

You are what you eat. Our lives are shaped by what we consume. Whatever we chew and swallow, whatever we ingest, whatever runs in our veins will impact our state of being, our attitudes, our actions. Jesus is God's word, God's wisdom God's love in flesh and blood, and he offers himself to us as food. To eat Jesus is to eat healthy – we thrive on his grace and truth, and so we become grace and truth for others.

I wonder if we should have read another two verses beyond our Gospel text from John today. If we had, we would have heard the disciples' reaction to Jesus' words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. "This teaching is difficult," they murmur to each other. "Who can accept it?" No kidding. Today marks the fourth consecutive Sunday that we've heard Jesus teach about the bread of life, the true bread from heaven, the food that endures for eternal life. And so far, it's all well and good. We know what it is to eat bread, and maybe we can begin to imagine what it means that Jesus is heavenly bread. But, to feed on his flesh and blood? It's too graphic, too carnal. It conjures up images of cannibalism. It shocks our sensibilities.¹ If you're feeling a little squeamish, you're not alone. More than one preacher has admitted to sidestepping this Gospel out of sheer discomfort and preaching instead about something less offensive.

¹ Adele Stiles Resmer,

http://members.newproclamation.com/commentary.php?d8m=8&d8d=16&d8y=2015&atom_id=9817.

Yet, I can't help but think that **Jesus has a reason for saying what he says the way he says it.** When he specifies that the bread he has to offer “for the life of the world” is his flesh, he intends to get everyone’s attention. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” the people wonder. It’s an especially objectionable image when we consider that Jesus is teaching in a Jewish context, and Levitical law explicitly forbids observant Jews from drinking the blood of a slaughtered animal,² let alone a human being. Nevertheless, with the people already on edge, Jesus doubles down: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

But it’s not just for shock value; it’s not just to boost the ratings. If Jesus’ purpose is to feed a hungry world for the sake of abundant life,³ then these words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood are good news. **The meal that he so vividly describes is part and parcel of the incarnation itself, the wonder that God enters into bodily existence in full solidarity with a world that hungers to know God. And, if Jesus – the word, the wisdom, the love of God in flesh and blood – offers himself to us as food, then we are fed with nothing less than divine life.**⁴

To borrow a popular aphorism, you are what you eat. Our lives are shaped by what we consume. Whatever we chew and swallow, whatever we ingest,

² William H. Willimon, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 3, 359.

³ John 10:10.

⁴ Gail Ramshaw,

http://members.newproclamation.com/commentary.php?d8m=8&d8d=16&d8y=2015&atom_id=9784.

whatever runs in our veins will impact our state of being, our attitudes, our actions. And, according to our Gospel, to eat the flesh and blood of Jesus is to eat healthy: “Whoever eats me will live because of me.” **When we consume Jesus – when we receive and digest him – we thrive on his grace and truth,⁵ and so we become grace and truth for others.**

But, Jesus is not often our first choice on the menu. We tend to keep him at arm’s length,⁶ like a still-life painting, a decorative feature at a meal we’ve chosen for ourselves. **Instead of Jesus, we feast on financial security, material possessions, social esteem, partisan ideology, national pride, entertainment, drugs and alcohol – any of the tasty treats that we convince ourselves will satisfy our deepest hunger.** No matter that it’s junk food; we crave it nonetheless. And once we get our fill, our lives amount to the value of our assets, or the things we own, or the approval we expect from others, or the certainty of our worldview, or the numbness of our self-medication. We are what we eat.

The promise at the heart of the gospel is that there is a healthier option. “My flesh is true food,” Jesus insists, “and my blood is true drink.” **He is not content to be kept at a distance, but insists on giving and pouring himself out as our most important meal. Jesus is food that forms us, food that**

⁵ John 1:14.

⁶ Resmer.

becomes “part of [our] essence”⁷: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” You are what you eat.

To quote theologian William Willimon,

Jesus intends to have all of us, body and soul. His truth wants to burrow deep within us, to consume us as we consume him ...to nourish every nook and cranny of our being.⁸

This means that

There is no knowing who the Christ is without visceral, total engagement. We will not be able to comprehend him by sitting back, comfortable in the pew, and coolly considering him as if he were an abstract, disembodied idea. Incarnation means that we must get up, come forward, hold out empty hands, sip wine, [and] chew bread....⁹

Dear church, **our faith is the receiving end of a feast, a spread of grace and abundant life that God sets out for us in the midst of other, less satisfying options. And, Christ is the main course; he is true food and true drink. And, you are what you eat. So come, eat, drink, and live!**

⁷ Resmer quoting Robert Kysar.

⁸ *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 3, 361.

⁹ *Ibid.* 359.