

Today we complete our five week study of Jesus as the Bread of Life and the gospel reading tells us that we are not the only ones who struggle with this – the disciples also found it difficult. In fact, some who were following him turned away.

Jesus said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” We hear this same language when Jesus talks about himself as the true vine. And I think this is the meat of the passage. When we eat and drink Jesus we are participating in his life and abiding in him.

Jesus is the incarnation of God in Christ. We cannot separate Jesus and the Christ any more than we can separate body and soul. They are one and the same. And we know that Creation finds its beginning and its full completion in the Christ. So when we participate in the life of Jesus, as we eat and drink him, we are participating in the life of the Christ who is the life of the ever-expanding universe. And in this participation in the greater life of the whole, we too find life. No longer are we isolated individuals, no longer are we man against nature but as we abide in Christ we are mystically part of the entire adventure of creation but in a different way.

We can get very sentimental about the beauty of creation, yet there is pain and suffering built in to the basic model. The osprey takes a fish, the hawk catches a sparrow, humans kill and eat chickens. Life is taken, life is given up in order to provide life. God’s life is given up in order for us to have life, and how else would we take that life into ourselves except by eating it? We gain our life from the life of the chicken or the carrot by eating it. Is it so surprising to think that we get our life from Jesus by eating him?

We all get energy from somewhere. We get our physical energy from food, but we often get our inner energy from the wrong places. Some of us fuel our daily lives with anxiety – what might happen if I don't keep everything under control? If I don't get everything done? Some of us fuel our lives with the desire to be liked – constantly trying to keep everyone happy, to live up to everyone's expectations. Others fuel their lives with sadness and longing, if only I had had more opportunities, if only I hadn't made that mistake, if only I had been more loved or more loving.

As a culture, we are fueling ourselves with anger, indignation and scandal. Instead of eating Jesus, we are eating one another. You only have to glance at the news to see that it's a man eat man world, and while we are busy turning on each other, the Arctic ice is melting at an unprecedented rate and in Yemen a US supported war has killed thousands and thousands more are dying from famine.

Where do you get your energy? What is your diet? If you are not eating Jesus, who are you eating?

Are you feeding yourself with Christ, with forgiveness, non-violence, reconciliation and gentleness or are you feeding yourself with anxiety, fear and anger?

The fact that you are here this morning means that at some part of your being is a longing for the life of Christ. You want to be a participant in the life of God, the life that goes on and on, everlasting. You want to be an active part of the Body of Christ which is not just the church, the gathering of the faithful, but is in fact the entire creation.

When we gather for eucharist we will be symbolically and really participating in the life of Christ. But it's not magic. It's not magic.

If I eat a wafer, if I drink some port it does not turn me into Christ. That transformation is a gift of God, given by the Holy Spirit. And only rarely does that transformation happen without our active participation. The grace of God works in our hearts to draw us towards God , the true source of our energy, the true source of our life. But we get to be involved. Unless we are participating in Christ with our hearts and with our wills, the wafer and the port will be just that.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul has some pretty strict words about this. He says, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves.”

It’s got a judgmental tone that we don’t associate with the God of our understanding, but I think what he is saying is important. When we come to communion, we are choosing to participate in the life of the Universe in a different way, a conscious way, which is the path of non-violence and peace. If we come without the intention of eating and drinking Jesus who was so willing to live the life of compassion and non-violence that he walked straight into the trap and was killed, if we come to the table without at least the willingness to forgive and to love and to treat everyone even our enemies with respect as the children of God, then we are totally screwed up.

Eating and drinking Jesus means changing the place we get our sustenance. Not from the news. Not from binge watching crime or drama series. Not from working out at the gym, nor from anger, anxiety, fear, or the desire to be loved.

And so we get to watch our inner lives. Where do your thoughts take you, again and again? What are you feeding yourself? What is your inner diet?

Just as when we choose to change our physical diet we have to watch ourselves because old habits are difficult to break, so when we change our inner diet we have to watch our thoughts and our attitudes. It is easy for us to stay with old patterns. In fact, eating Jesus is not easy. It is so not easy that many of those who were following Jesus turned away when they realized what was being asked of them.

When you find yourself harboring resentments, judging other people, feeding your own anxiety or fear, it is time to turn back to Jesus and choose to feed on him instead. When you find yourself turning on someone else in anger, or when someone lashes out at you, it is an opportunity to feed on Jesus and replace anger with forgiveness and love.

I am going to close with the Cherokee teaching story that I have shared before:

An old Cherokee was teaching his grandson about life.

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.

“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.”

“The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”