

Eat Me!

[Ephesians 4:1-16](#)

[John 6:24-35](#)

I think I was in my first year at seminary when I preached my first sermon at St. Benedict's. It was on some part of this passage in John about eating the true bread. I had worked hard on trying to explain what Jesus was saying and thought I did a pretty good job. Afterwards, Bob Pelfrey came up to me and said some nice things about the sermon, and then he said, "Of course we don't know if Jesus said any of that, right?"

And of course we don't. The writer of this gospel put his work together at the end of the first century so about 60 to 70 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. As a result, this gospel speaks to us more of the early church's experience of Jesus the Christ than of the historic actions of his life. John is the king of metaphor which is why many people find his words more meaningful or more mystical than the earlier gospels. Under his pen, the feeding of the five thousand is not just about people getting fed but a demonstration of the reign of God.

In today's gospel we have a conversation where Jesus discusses with the people how they might respond to this sign. He tells them not to work for ordinary bread which goes moldy but for the bread that he offers that never goes off. To which they respond with a question about how they do the work of God, presumably they are asking how they can work for this eternal bread, and Jesus tells them to believe in him.

This is a challenging response for us in the 21st century because we think of believing as a mental activity connected with facts. We believe that there is a place called Palestine even though most of us have never been there, but we believe in it because we have been told so much about it so consistently. In the past few years we have discovered that we can't believe everything we are told. Some of it is propaganda or "fake news."

Just as Bob said those many years ago, “Do we even know that Jesus said this?” How then are we to believe in Jesus?

I don't think that Jesus was asking them to believe in him as a fact; that wouldn't have made sense when he was standing there in front of them. I think he was asking them to have faith in him as the one whom God had sent and anointed. This is the kind of faith which changes lives. It isn't believing that something is true, rather living into the truth of it. When the weather forecast is for heat, believing it means that we wear cool clothing. Believing in Jesus means changing our lives; living as though the God in all things really matters.

For some reason, the people who were debating with Jesus then ask him for another sign, even though they were there for the transformation of the loaves and fishes. Perhaps they wanted breakfast, because they refer to Moses providing manna in the wilderness for more than one meal. Jesus responded, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.” There's an important change in tense here. It was not Moses who **gave** but it is my Father who **gives**.

The manna in the wilderness is something that happened in the past but Jesus' Father gives the true bread from heaven which gives life to the world. This true bread is available here and now. Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Isn't that an amazing promise? “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Of course it is metaphor and there's nothing more deadly to a metaphor than to analyze it until it has emptied out and dead. So rather than do that myself, I'm going to invite you to take a few minutes with your neighbor or one or two people sitting around you and share how you understand this. What does Jesus mean when he says. “I am the bread of

life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

...

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes several statements where he says “I am...” such as “I am the good shepherd,” “ I am the true vine,” or as we heard today “I am the bread of life.”

In each one, he invites us into relationship with God through him. We are the sheep, we are the branches of the vine, we are the ones who eat the bread. Each “I am...” statement invites a response from us. Are we willing to be the sheep or the branches. Are we willing to eat the bread from heaven?

In Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll, Alice saw “a little glass box that was lying under the table: she opened it, and found in it a very small cake, on which the words "EAT ME" were beautifully marked in currants. "Well, I'll eat it," said Alice, "and if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door: so either way I'll get into the garden, and I don't care which happens!"”

When we eat the bread of heaven it transforms us, making us into the people we were created to be. But we don’t know exactly what will happen or how it will. We may not even see the changes in ourselves. But as you know, we are what we eat. The bread of heaven, Jesus, transforms us into him. We become bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.

Until, in the words of Ephesians, “all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.... speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body... promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.”

Let us today declare with Alice, “Well, I’ll eat it... and I don’t care what happens!”