

Proverbs 9:1-6; John 6:51-58  
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost; August 19, 2018  
Caroline M. Kelly

This our second of three weeks looking at the sixth chapter of John's gospel, in which Jesus calls himself the bread of life.

By way of context, Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. The result of that great act of care and compassion is that Jesus developed a huge following of regular folks who want more miracles but he also gathered more enemies along the way as well.

Our text picks up with Jesus preaching in Capernum, his adult hometown, and his listeners don't necessarily like what they hear. They say to him things like, "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then does he say, 'I have come down out of heaven?'" .

So, if Jesus' words stir up the regular folks, you can imagine how they might really get under the skin of the religious authorities who demand some sort of proof, some sort of validating sign that would prove his claim to be the bread from heaven.

This is where we pick up today, with Jesus speaking primarily to the religious authorities in provocative but polite terms. When that doesn't seem to get much of a rise out of them, Jesus ramps it up.

Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church.<sup>1</sup>

[read text]

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/john-651-58-shocking-london/>

You are what you eat.

The first time I heard that phrase, I remember thinking I wouldn't mind being a marsh mellow or a chocolate bar or even a strawberry but I was definitely not up for barbecued pork butt or green lipped mussels. No way!

You are what you eat. When you're a kid, that statement will make you think twice about what you put in your mouth.

Then you realize that what your Mom is trying to do is get you to eat things that are supposed to be good for you – like peas and spinach and stuff like that. Yuck!

Using metaphors or allegories with young children will not always produce the result you are looking for.

I saw a particularly funny example of this on Facebook recently where a father was trying to teach his son how to hit a baseball. He had a special stand that held the baseball at just the right height for his young son to practice hitting it. The father, thinking he was giving his son a helpful tip, told him to keep his eye on the ball. The child dutifully responded by walking up to the ball and trying to touch the ball with his eye.

Keep your eye on the ball. That's what his dad said.

A similar thing happens when Jesus tries to teach the people around him who he is and what kind of relationship he is offering them. When Jesus claims that he is the living bread that they must eat in order to live, his opponents are outraged.

"What?" they argue among themselves, as if he has just told them they have to eat his arm or leg. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Yuck. That's gross!"

This kind of misunderstanding happens a lot in John's gospel - Jesus speaks metaphorically, but his audience responds as if he is speaking literally.

Remember his conversation with Nicodemus? Nicodemus wants to know more about Jesus, so he arranges for a one on one visit. During their conversation, Jesus says, "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus struggles to understand. “How can anyone be born who has already been born and grown up? You can’t re-enter your mother’s womb and be born again. What are you talking about?”

Likewise, when Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman who comes to draw water from the well, he says, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever.”

The woman responds, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t ever have to come back to this well again!”

You would think Jesus would be more helpful in his responses, but he doesn’t give Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman any help at all. When Nicodemus wonders what it means to be born from above, Jesus snaps back, “You call yourself a teacher of Israel and yet you do not know these things?”

When the Samaritan woman asks how she can get the living water Jesus is offering, he changes the subject completely. “Go get your husband,” he demands, knowing she doesn’t have one.

In today’s encounter in the synagogue, he continues this pattern, refusing to help the people understand what he is saying - refusing to make his claims more palatable, if you will. Instead, he actually makes the situation worse.

Following up his outrageous claim that he is the bread to be eaten, Jesus presses the analogy even further. “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will have no life in you. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats me will live.”

This is over the top for the Jews, a Jewish rabbi suggesting they drink his blood, a practice that Torah explicitly forbids when eating animal meat. Drinking blood and eating human flesh? Surely not!

Fred Craddock observes,

The new Testament probably offers no more shocking way of saying that Jesus Christ is not like Moses, giving the people something from God. Rather, in Jesus Christ, God is coming to us and giving life for life, and by our participation we have life in ourselves.

Moses had a special relationship with God. As a prophet, God used Moses to speak to the people. When the people complained they were thirsty, Moses made sure they got water. When they complained about being hungry, Moses made sure they got something to eat.

Jesus, on the other hand, lays claim to a relationship with God, a oneness with God, that is unparalleled, even in the gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke talk about Jesus as the Messiah, the son of God, Emmanuel - God with us - but only John refers to Jesus as the incarnation of God.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

In Eugene Peterson’s translation, God “became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”

Unlike Moses, Jesus offers us more than food and drink. He offers himself – his flesh for us to eat and his blood for us to drink.

This talk about flesh and blood sounds cannibalistic to the uninitiated, but to the early Christians in John’s audience, it would have sounded familiar. Every time they gathered to worship, they shared bread and wine.

They remembered the story of Jesus and how he fed the 5,000 with nothing more than five loaves and two fish. They knew he called himself the bread of life and they knew his radical claim to be one with God; how he had said “No one knows God except through me. Believe and you will live.” And they believed.

In today’s passage, it turns out it’s not enough to believe that Jesus is the bread of life. It’s not enough to *know* what God offers. The only way we can have life, says Jesus, is to take the bread of life – his flesh and blood – into our own bodies. The kind of life Jesus is talking about is

more than just physical or biological life. He’s talking about that life that is beyond words, indescribable, and yet we know it when we taste it. We get a taste of it when we love so deeply and profoundly that everything about us dies, passes away, and somehow, we are more fully alive than ever

before. Sometimes everything seems to fit together perfectly and all is right with the world; not because we got our way but because we knew our self to be a part of something larger, more beautiful, and more holy than anything we could have done. We were tasting life. There are moments when time stands still and we wish the moment would never end. In that moment we are in the flow, the wonder, and the unity of life, and it tastes good.<sup>2</sup>

We get a taste of this life when we participate in the sacrament of the of the Lord's Supper. We share this sacred meal in remembrance and thanksgiving for all the ways God's love is made manifest in our lives, most especially as it is embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Just before we come forward to receive the bread and wine, we pray that the bread and wine will become for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may in turn become the body of Christ for the world. His life for ours and ours for the world.

You are what you eat.

What we consume becomes a part of us. And as the church, as the body of Christ, we are more than Jesus' followers, we are extensions of his very self... God becomes fleshy in Jesus—God comes close to us, in Jesus. God enters into our lives, in Jesus. God feeds us and nourishes us, with the living bread from heaven. Jesus lives in us, and makes us living bread for the world.<sup>3</sup>

You are what you eat.

May it be so for each of us! Not just for us but indeed for the sake of the whole world.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://interruptingthesilence.com/2012/08/20/eat-me-drink-me-a-sermon-on-john-651-58-proper-15b/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.trinity-ec.org/sermons/sermon\\_08\\_26\\_12\\_hw.pdf](http://www.trinity-ec.org/sermons/sermon_08_26_12_hw.pdf)