

## We Are What We Eat

### John 6: 35-59

After reading these few verses, is it any wonder people think Christians are strange!? In fact, at one point, people thought Christians were so strange that early Christians were often accused of cannibalism because of statements just like these. As people of faith, we talk of eating Jesus' flesh. As people of faith, we talk of drinking his blood. As people of faith, we say these words every Sunday. But even we, as Disciples of Christ, who take communion every week, will admit that we struggle with just exactly what we mean when we say these words at the Lord's Table.

As strange as these words may seem, we cannot deny that these statements are an inherent piece of our faith and tradition. We know that for centuries, the Church has tried to wrap its mind around the mystery that surrounds the Lord's Table. There have even been big debates about whether the bread and the cup actually turn into Jesus' body and blood or do the bread and the cup only represent these things. Just for your knowledge, and just in case, you ever play Trivial Pursuit or you want to impress your friends at a party, in theological terms, these two notions about the bread and cup are called transubstantiation and consubstantiation. Transubstantiation means that the bread and the cup actually

turn into the body and blood of Jesus even though the elements stay the same. And consubstantiation means that the bread and the cup only represent the body and blood of Jesus. And in case you were wondering, we practice consubstantiation. We hold that the bread and cup represent Jesus' body and blood.

And before we assume that surely no one believes that the bread and cup actually turn into Jesus' body and blood, yes people do. In fact, this thought is part of the Catholic Church doctrine practiced still today. That's why the priests finish up the bread and drink up the wine after the Lord's Supper. The elements are too sacred to throw away.

But I digress. I only share this information to say that different faith traditions have different beliefs about the Lord's Table and that for many years, the wider Church has tried to put into words, put into concepts that we would all understand the mystery that surrounds the Lord's Table but we really didn't do a great job of it.

But here is what we do know about the Lord's Table. We know that these words have power for us as people of faith. We know that these words hold meaning for us as people of faith. We know these very words that we say at the Lord's Table give us life.

We know all this and freely admit that our relationship with these life giving words, these life transforming words, is complicated.

And even with its complications, the language that surrounds communion is a deep and integral part of our worship life as the Church. And even we who take communion every Sunday will admit that we aren't exactly sure what we mean when we say these words. We aren't sure we know all the details that surround the Lord's Table but there is one thing we do know. We know deep in our hearts, deep in our souls that that somehow, somehow, by partaking of the bread and drinking from the cup, we are connected to our God through our Savior Jesus Christ in rich, life-giving, life-transforming ways. And that is what matters for us as people of faith.

I will tell you that this sermon remained distant from me all week. I struggled with how to put the mystery that surrounds communion into words that would preach. I even thought to myself, if the Church in two thousand years hasn't come up with a concise answer to the mystery that surrounds communion, what makes you think you can do it in a week for a Sunday sermon?

Well, I'll be honest. I'm not sure I can, but as a person of faith, I know that I've got to try simply because the Lord's Table is such an integral part of my personal faith. So I kept listening and waiting and thankfully the Spirit of God kept

reminding me of how closely we are connected to Lord's Table in our daily lives. From the food we partake at our own dinner tables to the nourishment that our food gives to us each and every day, as people of faith, as part of our daily lives, we discover that we are connected deeply to the Table in so many life-giving ways, more ways than we could ever imagine.

As I was thinking about our connection to our tables, thinking about our connection to Lord's Table as people of faith, I couldn't help but remember a trip to the Heifer Ranch a few years ago that our youth took as a mission experience. On this trip, one of the experiences that the whole group was able to participate in was deciding whether or not to kill a rabbit for food. Now, let me stop right there and say that I know this sounds horrible and mean but there really is significant meaning behind this act, significant meaning that we have forgotten in our everyday lives as consumers.

Let me explain: For most of our youth and let's face, for most of us, we don't know where our food comes from when we purchase it at our grocery stores. Our chicken breasts come nicely packaged in groups of four. Our ham comes prepackaged in colorful foil. Even our vegetables and fruits are organized in pleasing displays for us to sort through and pick out the best ones. We have tricked ourselves into believing that our food comes this way. We tend to forget the process of what it takes to get that food to our plates. We tend to forget what is

exactly entailed for that chicken to make its way into our salads. We tend to forget that at one point our food was a living breathing thing. And in doing so, the bigger lesson that We tend to forget is the life-giving sacrifice that comes along with the gift of food..

On the whole, we are so disconnected from our food chain. We just assume that our food comes prepackaged and prepared for our consumption. We don't think about the farmers who raised our food. We don't think about the workers that picked our food. We don't think about how much effort it takes to get the food to our stores. All we know is that when we walk into the grocery store, our food is there, ready for our consumption. Our food is there aisle after plentiful aisle.

All in all, as consumers, we don't really know much about the food that fills our plates not do we think about it. It is just there, ready for us to consume, to fill our bellies, to satisfy a craving. All this is true simply because we are disconnected from the food chain, food that gives us life, food that gives us nourishment, food that feeds our bodies. Food that gave its life so that we might live.

And in order to change this disconnected way of thinking, Heifer offers to its group this option of killing a rabbit. It wants to reconnect people once more to the

food chain. It wants to change people from simply being consumers to becoming more conscious of the connection to our tables once more.

Now, I will say, for the group to eat the rabbit, the whole group, and I mean the whole group has to decide and agree on this act and then the whole group, and I mean the whole group has to stand there and watch. The kids can't just say yes, then wait for the meal to arrive on their plates. They have to stay and watch. They intentionally become part of the process. They get to know their food on a very personal basis.

So if the whole group decides to move forward with this act, the Heifer workers have a ceremony of life for that rabbit, thanking it for giving its life so that we may eat, thanking it for giving its life so that our bodies may be nourished, thanking it for giving its life so that we might live. Sounds familiar right?

The whole purpose of this ceremony at Heifer is to teach the group to have more respect for the things we eat, to have more appreciation for the animals, the vegetables, the fruits that gave up their lives so that we might live. Heifer wants to remind the groups that our food doesn't come prepackaged, ready for our consumption. Our food at one point was a living breathing thing and it gave its life so that we might live. Our food gave of itself so that we might be nourished and sustained.

Heifer's point is that "what enters our bodies is giving up itself in its present form in order to pass that life on to us". Heifer understands that we are what we eat and this is no small thing. The giving of life is sacred and should be respected, not just consumed. What we eat and what we drink becomes part of who we are. we now share the gift of life. Something flesh and blood gave of itself to nourish and strengthen our bodies. And now that sacrifice has become part of us.

Each and every time we gather at our tables, we should honor that sacrifice and take it seriously. We should not just consumed it. It is this sacrifice that sustains us and helps nourish our bodies so that we may grow. This sacrifice is gift of life. This way of understanding what we eat and drink changes us and puts into perspective our connection to all of God's creation. God's creation is not just here for us to consume but it is here to sustain us through the gift of life. It is here to nourish us so that we can become the people that God created us to be. God's creation is a gift of life that we should honor and respect each and every time we gather at our tables.

I don't know how many times, I have heard from groups who came back from the Heifer Ranch who said that the moment of the life ceremony was the defining moment for them on the trip, that they will never look at their food in the same way nor will they take their food for granted ever again. They began to understand their connection to their food. They began to understand the gift of life

that was given so that we might live. They get what it means to eat and drink and through this act of nourishment be connected to the wider world that surrounds us.

That's powerful stuff, stuff we tend to forget, especially when we go to the store and just consume. The food on our tables is not just stuff to nourish our bodies. The food on our tables are gifts of life given so that we might live.

Sounds familiar right?

When we begin to think this way about the gift of life, in terms of our text today, we realize that when Jesus says he was the Bread of Life, that he was talking about more than just meal here, about more than just bread to satisfy our earthly hunger. In fact, just a few verses before these, Jesus feed the five thousand and when, they came back looking for more, instead of offering them more bread and fishes, Jesus offers them the Word of God to nourish their souls. He offers them a gift that is not meant for consumption but rather a gift of life that was to be taken and savored. Jesus offers them a gift that will bring them new life. He offers them the opportunity to experience God as real and present in their lives.

Now, the interesting note, is that there is no Lord's Supper story in the Gospel of John. Sure, Jesus gathers in the upper room with his disciples but in that moment, he talks about being God's servants for the world and shows them how to do this by washing their feet. He does not break the bread. He does not offer the

cup of new life. For John, his whole Gospel has been an opportunity for people to encounter the mystery and presence of God, to experience God as real in their every day lives. And John does this by offering the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

And this part of John's Gospel is no different. We as readers, as listeners are offered the flesh and blood of Christ and we hear the Eucharistic overtones in it. We read Jesus' speech and immediately our mind goes to the Lord's Table. We hear Jesus' statement about him being the Bread of Life and immediately we are reminded of the very words that we say each and every Sunday: "This is my body broken for you. Take, eat and remember me. This is the cup of the new covenant that is poured out for you in my blood. Take, drink and remember me."

These are the very words that remind us that it was through Jesus, who was flesh and blood like you and me, it was Jesus through which the life-giving power of God was revealed, through which the life-giving grace of God transformed lives. These are the very words in which we began to experience the life-giving love of God claiming us and naming us as God's very own. These are the very words in which we began to experience God as real and present in our everyday lives. We hear these words and we know that it is through the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, that we experience new life.

God becomes real for us because we remember the earthly life of Jesus. We remember his teachings. We remember his preachings. We remember how he changed lives through his healings. We remember that it was through his earthly life, death and resurrection that God was present to us and for us.

As people of faith we are told that Jesus was God Incarnate, full of grace, full of Truth, but we are also told that the Word became flesh and lived among. It is this earthly flesh and blood that changed our lives. It is this earthly flesh and blood that gave us new life. It is this earthly flesh and blood that helped us begin to understand the mystery and power of God's grace and love.

And it is this earthly flesh and blood that we experience each and every time we gather at God's Table.

When we gather at the Lords' table, we take into ourselves God's presence, God's love, and God's grace. This experience changes us. It transforms us. And more importantly, it connects us with the world around us. At God's Table, we begin to understand the sacrifice of life that was given so that we might live. And, by eating of Jesus' body and drinking from the cup, we begin to understand that we are now compelled to offer ourselves, just like Jesus did for us, we are compelled to offer ourselves as nourishment for the bodies and minds of others so that they

might find a connection with God, so that they might have a new life in Christ as well.

Christ gave us his life so that we might live and in turn, we are called to do the same. We are called to give our lives so that others might live as well. At the Lords' Table, we eat of Jesus' flesh and drink of his blood, to nourish our bodies so that we might offer our flesh and blood as nourishment for someone else. As people of faith, we gladly proclaim that We are What we Eat, know that We eat of the body of Christ so that we might become the Body of Christ for all of God's creation.

Yes, its complicated. And yes people might think we are strange for saying this words but we know that every time we say this words, these words about eating Jesus' flesh and drinking the cup of the new covenant poured out in his blood, we know that every time we say these words, God promises to come to real flesh and blood people, like you and me. It is through these powerful words of life, love and sacrifice that God promises to be present in the real flesh and blood moments of our lives. It is Through these life transforming words that we say at the table each and every week that we are reminded that God is present, nourishing us and strengthening so that we can experience the new life of God's Kingdom surrounded by God's grace, surrounded by God's love, surrounded by God peace.

It is through these words that we know that we are given life and invited to share our lives with others so that they too might be nourished and sustained.

It is through the flesh and blood of Jesus that God is made real for us as people of faith. It is through the flesh and blood of Jesus that we are connected to the world around us. It is through the sharing of the flesh and blood of Jesus that we begin to understand the mystery and power of the grace and love of God.

As people of faith, we celebrate the fact that we are what we eat.

So may we always eat from the Bread of Life and drink from the cup of the new covenant so that we truly do become the Body of Christ for all of God's creation. Amen.