

“Lord, to whom can we go?”

First of all, are any of you thinking as I was when I first read today’s reading, “Enough with the bread metaphor already; could we please move on to something else. I am starting to get a little sick of bread especially the fleshy kind. In fact, this whole business about eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood is starting to feel a little nauseating rather than sanctifying?” Good news. This is the last week of the Bread of Life discourse, albeit next week’s passage has to do with another aspect of eating.

For five Sundays in a row we have been discussing bread in one form or another. On July 29 it was actual bread as Jesus fed the five thousand with just two fish and five loaves of bread; food that was provided by one faithful and trusting child. Then we moved into his long discourse on the Bread of Life and specifically that Jesus is the Bread of Life. This discourse started with the crowds of people who had followed Jesus back and forth across the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). Then it was “the Jews” who did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. Before we delve into this week’s part of the story I would like to know what you all have taken away from the last four weeks of discussion about bread and Jesus as the Bread of Life.

Some thoughts the congregations offered on the topic of Bread of Life are:

- Jesus’ body as the bread of life is a metaphor. We do not need to be repulsed because we understand the metaphor in ways that the people in the story did not.
- When we eat the bread of life we do so at the altar. We commune in community. Our differences are inconsequential because each of us looks to something more important than political party, income, clubs, schools and other allegiances, we look to God in Christ Jesus.
- Jesus speaks at length about this topic in order to help us understand the importance of this new bread and how consuming it brings Christ into us and us into Christ.

And then we get to this week’s reading where many of the disciples respond by saying, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” Can we blame them? I wonder if we could be as steadfast as Peter. It is rather amazing that Peter who often bumbles along saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, who blurts out his feelings, and who can make the most embarrassing mistakes is also the one who seems to be saying the right thing at the right time in this instance.

Peter, who one might think is a bit too blunt and not at all subtle, understands what Jesus has been teaching all along. He does not get hung up on the bread equals flesh metaphor, or the blood as true drink saying. When the disciples outside of the core twelve begin to turn their backs on Jesus,

Gene LeCouteur
Emmanuel Episcopal Church
Middleburg, VA

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B
8:00 & 10:30 a.m.
August 26, 2018

Peter says “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Peter does not respond specifically about the Bread of Life teaching that others find so difficult. Rather Peter acknowledges that Jesus has the “words of eternal life.” These words are the ones that the other disciples, “the Jews” and the crowds find confusing or difficult. These are the words that for nearly two thousand years people like us have lived on. The great cloud of witnesses and saints that have gone before us and will come after us are sustained by these words and this bread.

Each week we meet at the table and take the bread and the wine that are the body and blood of Jesus. We take in these elements as if they were as life sustaining as the food and drink that we eat at other meals. The truth is that they are. The bread and wine sustain us in ways that are the same and different from the food of our table at home. The bread and wine that is Jesus changes and enlivens us for doing God’s work in the world. The bread and wine that is Jesus, eaten together as a community of love in communion with the one who is Love with a capital L gives us the capacity for greater love for others and for ourselves.

With all due respect to our brothers and sisters in Christ whose theology says that communion is only a remembrance or an act of respect for Jesus; what we experience at that table is so much more. It is a joining with the disciples and Jesus at the table on that fateful night nearly two thousand years ago. It is a joining with Jesus and the disciples in the ministry to go forth and share “the words of eternal life.” It is a joining with the sinners and the saints who gave their lives over to God in the name of Jesus, because as Peter said, “Lord, to whom can we go?” We know that we have no place else to go but to Jesus. We know that the only thing to do is to join him at the table and eat and drink the bread and wine that is the food of angels and of all of us broken and wounded but believing and healing people whom God has called to join with Jesus in ministering to this broken, wounded and unbelieving world.

Take and eat the bread of life that was given for you and you and you and you. This is the bread of life that was and is given for every one of us that we may live abundantly in Christ Jesus and that he may live in us. That life is the gift of eternal life through his eternal food.

May your joy be the joy of one who is beloved.

May your life be rich in the love of Christ.

May the body of Christ and the cup of salvation strengthen you, console you, heal you, and enliven you for the days and challenges ahead.