

“the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you.... For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and blood abide in me, and I in them.

Our gospel lesson this week is nothing if not gory. Listen to those words and how they must have shocked the people who heard them. It was forbidden to drink the blood of animals and here is Jesus going one step further saying that those who come to him must eat his flesh and drink his blood. It sounds almost cannibalistic.

And I might add that those wafers that we eat, the wine that we drink, they are not exactly comparable. If we really heard those words each week we might be more reluctant to come to communion because we might well wonder what we were getting ourselves into.

It could be that Jesus is drawing an analogy between himself and the lambs at Passover. Remember that those lambs were slaughtered not only to feed the Hebrews preparing to leave Egypt but the blood of the lambs was used to mark the lintels of the Hebrew's doorways so that when the angel of the Lord passed over their houses the Hebrews would not be afflicted by the last plague, the plague in which the Lord promised to kill the firstborn of every creature, human or livestock.

It's a good reminder that freedom is bought with sacrifice. Blood sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed his body for us. He lived and died that we might be free of the consequences of our own sin. But that was not the only sacrifice God was willing to leave behind his divinity to be born of human flesh with all of our frailties and vulnerabilities.

Each week we remember, and honor, and partake of this sacrifice and offer ourselves to God in return, not because we can pay back what has been done for us but it is all that we have to offer. It was Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, one of the first known gourmets back in the early 19th century who wrote “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are”.

Therefore if we are what we eat we too become part of the body that was sacrificed for us, we too become part of the body of Christ. And if all of that stuff about flesh and blood doesn't scare you, then knowing that we are now a part of something bigger than ourselves certainly should!

There is however another component to what Jesus is saying. Jesus is God's word incarnate. It's how John's gospel begins *“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...”* Incarnate means enfleshed, in human form. And the Word is also associated with Wisdom. Can we not then hear a paraphrase of these words from Proverbs in what Jesus is saying to his listeners? *“Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”* Whew, no cannibalism at all. We are to be fed by the Word of God, the Wisdom of God, the God who was and is and is to come.

It's too bad our reading from psalm 34 doesn't include verse 8 because verse 8 sums up what Jesus is saying *“Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who trust in him!”* As usual those who came to hear Jesus speak were not listening to him at the right level. Everything he was saying was making scripture come alive as he himself was alive.

So how do we here at St. Paul's hear the Word of God? What happens to us when we taste and see? We are people who have been called out to this particular community, in this particular place in this particular time because somewhere, somehow, some time, God's word spoke to us. It might have come as a lifeline, it might have come because we were searching for something more, it might have because we thought it was a good thing to do for the sake of our children. Whatever the reason we came and we come back again each week hoping to be fed in the body and the blood, the bread and the wine, and in the Word, the Word that is to help guide and transform our lives, not only our lives but the life of the community in which we find ourselves.

And, as we have heard before, hearing the Word is not enough, we are called to action. Sometimes in the moment it is hard to realize what we have accomplished. I was reminded of that Thursday Evening in our vestry meeting. Robin Sconzo had been continuing her purging and cleaning in preparation for her move and she came across some notes from a retreat that we held in April of 2012. During that retreat the vestry shared their best experiences at St. Paul's and how they valued the people in this community as well as its sense of mission in what we give and do in direct service to others.

I certainly wouldn't argue that these feelings aren't also true today but the notes from that retreat also listed some of what that vestry wanted for St. Paul's.

- a) Strengthen our faith and connection to God and bring everyone to a full knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
- b) All to strive for common goal of keeping church alive and active, get more people involved to work harder with their time and talent
- c) Church building restored to respectful proper condition
- d) Growth in number of parishioners
- e) Balance budget with extra money
- f) Recognition in the community
- g) Long tenure for priest to give continuity
- h) Re-establish the music program
- i) A deeper understanding of other vestry members
- j) Thrift shop started and thriving
- k) Decorate vestry room to make it more inviting
- l) Create a parish cookbook
- m) Air conditioning

The expressions on the faces of the vestry Thursday evening as Robin read through this list were a mixture of surprise, pride, and pleasure. Over the past six years we have touched on all of these in one way or another – and I will tell you that the parish cook book was researched and deep-sixed (thankfully) but the rest of these we have begun to address. Some more visibly than others and nothing is complete but progress has been made on all fronts. That's what we can do together. That's how we have responded to God's call, and by God's grace, that's how

we have managed to work together as the body of Christ. Bless you Robin for bringing those notes to our attention.

Nevertheless even more striking for me was to look around the room on Thursday evening and realize that 6 of those vestry members had not even been here when we held the retreat in 2012. Three of them were members of St. Paul's at the time but had never been actively involved in any ministry and one was not even a Christian at the time!

Permeable boundaries, the ability for a new person to come into an organization and be incorporated into its life is a sign of a healthy culture and for that I am truly grateful. Together we are all part of the body of Christ, and all of us have a part to play as our lives are transformed. For this reason our collect is a fitting prayer as we look to continue our life together.

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.