

## YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Pentecost 13-B August 19, 2018

John 6:51-58

“You are what you eat.” Speaking for myself and my taste for carbohydrates, I guess that means I am *bread*. For our purposes this morning, that might be a good entry point into our fourth consecutive reading from the sixth chapter of John’s gospel.

We are now beyond the half-way point in this bread of life series of readings from the sixth chapter of John’s gospel. There is both excitement and a feeling that, “OK, we’ve gotten the point. Can we move on?”

Today’s installment reveals an argument as some of the people are asking: “How can he say that he is giving us his flesh and his blood to eat?” If you are really hearing the words of Jesus literally, they sound less than appetizing. Or as preacher Martin Copenhaver recalled:

“On [this] occasion, when I repeated Jesus’ familiar words, ‘This is my body, broken for you; this is my blood, shed for you’ a small girl suddenly said in a loud voice, ‘Ew, yuk!’ The congregation looked horrified,” he continues, “as if someone had splattered blood all over the altar — which, in effect, is just what the little girl had done with her exclamation.” [cited by David Lose in “Dear Partner,” August 10, 2015 at [www.davidlose.net](http://www.davidlose.net)]

We truly get the idea of what is at stake for Jesus, not just by offering these words, but in the way he lived, taught, healed, and died. All of this “for you.” And that is Jesus’ point. What he offers, what he does, is not for himself, but for us. And, while it cost him his life, this whole remembrance of him is not as much about sacrifice as it is about relationship.

For Lutherans, that meant a move beyond the literalism of “transubstantiation” to “real presence.” What that means is, rather than focusing on the bread and wine being transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus by reciting the Words of Institution, we say that Jesus is truly present “in, with, and under” the bread and the wine. This recalls the promise of Jesus that “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” [Matthew 18:20] That is to say when you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are receiving Jesus himself, because he is truly present in the bread and the wine. Just as Jesus is present among us as we pray together, sing together, and proclaim good news together—he is in the gifts of the Table.

Jesus on the cross offered himself up for the whole world in what I believe was not God’s demand for a “pound of flesh” as payment for our sins, but rather Jesus’ act of obedience and mercy, with a concern first and foremost for “the other”—that is, those around him, together with all who would come after him.

An obituary for a young man who was carried under by a rip current not far from here spoke of his making “the ultimate sacrifice.” He jumped into the water to save others from drowning. [Outer Banks Voice, July 23, 2018] It is the same kind of heroism that soldiers and law enforcement and a lot of “everyday people” have done. It is the act of love that allows you to place your own life on the line for the sake of others—even people you don’t know.

When Jesus spoke of eating and drinking *him*, he promised his friends and all who heard him in the crowd that he would forever be part of them. Outside of the church, I can think of “drinking a toast” to someone we care about or someone whose life we celebrate. Inside the church we call it

Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, or as Luther referred to it: "The Sacrament of the Altar." This is the way we approach Jesus, and the way he approaches us, in remembrance, in celebration, and in oneness together. When we "eat his body and drink his blood" we acknowledge that he is in us, and we in him.

And that is why I tried to set the tone for these few moments of reflection by repeating the oft-heard expression: "You are what you eat." If we take these words to heart, we believe that in eating and drinking the bread and the wine—the body and the blood of Jesus—we live out that belief by being Christ to the world. As Christians, we take on that name. And believing his promise that we, too can do great things in his name, we become the hands and the feet of Jesus in the world. You are what you eat. There is no higher calling. Amen.