

Come, Be Served

August 19, 2012

John 6: 51-58

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." 52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

Eat my flesh, Drink my blood! Normally I like to start my sermons with some nice little segue. I like to ease you into the heart of what I plan to talk about. I worked for a while on this one, and just couldn't find a way. Then again, I'm not sure this passage is about ease. Jesus was pretty much in your face with this statement. Listen again to verses 53 thru 55: ⁵³ **Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.** Jesus was pretty blunt with the people. You want eternal life, here is what you have to do. There is no wiggle room, there are no if's, no ands, and no buts. There was no I would like for you to... there was no would you think about... it was do this, period. If I had continued reading to verse 66 we would have read **From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.** It was a hard lesson that most could not follow. They had no real idea what Jesus was talking about. It sounded of cannibalism, something that was strictly forbidden by Jews. Here again, as I mentioned last week, people of that time were literalist. So taken literally, eat my flesh, drink my blood, I'm sure they had a problem with his statements.

Even though our scripture lesson is from John this morning, I want to take just a moment to look at the recording of an event that is written about in the other three gospels, but not in John. The event is what we as Christians call the last supper and it took place during the celebration of the Feast of the Passover. I think it's important that we remember the significance of the Passover to the Jews. Moses and Aaron have been asking the Pharaoh to let the Jews go and obviously, he has not. God has hit Egypt with a series of plagues all to no avail. So God sends one last plague to Egypt, the killing of the first born. In chapter 12 of the book of Exodus the Jews are given instructions on how they were to prepare their houses so that the angel of death would "pass over" their houses and not kill the firstborn inside that house. They were to sacrifice a lamb and paint his blood over their door. The angel of death would see the blood and know this was the house of a Jew and not kill the first born in that house. Instructions are also given on eating the rest of the lamb and certain other foods that night. The rest of the chapter tells how the Jews are to celebrate this night in the future. OK, now you understand the Passover. So back to Matthew, Mark and Luke.

In Matthew 26: 26-28 we read; **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."** In Mark 14: 22-24 we read; **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many."** And finally in Luke 22: 19-20 we read: **And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new**

covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." In each of these three gospels, Jesus says this is my body and this is my blood. In Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus is having the meal with the disciples and is telling them of his upcoming death. He is instructing them that the bread they are about to eat is symbolic of his body and the wine they are about to drink is symbolic of his blood. During the Passover, a lamb was sacrificed to God. The lamb's blood was the sign to save the first-born. Jesus Christ is the lamb of God, who was sacrificed to save us from our sins. This is the last blood sacrifice that had to be made to God. These three passages are where we get our sacrament of communion. The body of Christ was to feed our souls; the blood of Christ was to wash away our sins. The Apostle Paul served communion to the church in Corinth. Listen to 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17; **Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.** And in chapter 11:24-26; **And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.** The Gospel of John does not record the breaking of bread or pouring of the cup. John records Jesus washing the feet of the Disciples just before the Passover Feast. Some theologians feel that Chapter six is where Jesus is predicting his death. Listen to verse 51: **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."** Which I will give for the life of the world; sounds like a prediction to me. One of the things we have to remember is that bread was the main staple of people's diets back then. People received most of their nourishment from bread. But to be nourished by bread you have to eat it. You have to chew it, then swallow it, you have to take it in. You have to allow the bread to enter into you. That is the way it is with Jesus. We have to take him in. We have to accept him and ask him into our hearts. You have to let him become part of you. As we take communion each Sunday morning, we are reminded that Jesus is the bread of life, sent down from heaven. We eat the bread in remembrance of Jesus to feed our souls. Too often people try to keep him at arms length. For them Jesus is someone or something outside of them. However, you have to let him in then he can nourish you. Then he can give life to your heart and soul.

Over the last several months that I have served as your pastor, I have had several people come to me and ask about the healing service we used to have. I met with the elders and brought this up. They wanted to see it started again. I spoke with the deacons after church last Sunday and told them we were going to start this service again. Today will be our first Healing Service, and we will continue to have the service the third Sunday of each month. It's a very simple portion of our normal service. This morning, communion will be served by intinction. When it is time, I will ask that you please come forward, down the center aisle, receive your elements, then return to your seats by way of the side aisles. I, as your pastor, and two of our elders will be standing over to the side. If you wish special prayers of healing, after you have taken of the elements, please come by where we are, stop, and we will pray for you. If you wish to tell us what you specifically want us to pray for we will be more than glad to do so. If you simply wish prayers without telling us what to pray for, that will be fine as well. After we have prayed with you, you may then return to your seat. If you are unable to come forward for communion, the deacons will bring the elements to you. If you would like healing prayers and are not able to come forward, let a deacon know, they will let us know, and we will come to you. Our lord Jesus Christ came to earth to serve us. In keeping with the theme of service, as you come forward for communion this morning, the deacons will break the bread and serve you.

Jesus is the main course and this main course involves a sacrifice. Jesus said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life" Now if Jesus had just wanted to talk about accepting him as spiritual nourishment he could have just talked about bread. But he also talks about blood. He is obviously talking about his death on the cross. Jesus bled on the cross. This is my blood of the new covenant. The new covenant; there will have to be no more blood sacrifices made; Jesus has done that for us. The new covenant is that through belief in Jesus Christ, the sacrifices have been made. That through belief in Jesus Christ we may each have eternal life.