

Living Bread?

What feeds you?

Not, what is your favourite meal, but what feeds your soul?

What feeds your heart?

What makes you deliriously happy?

On Friday I married a couple beside a beautiful waterfall. Please don't ask me where I was, I have no idea, and don't think I could get there myself. A friend of the couple picked me up with his lovely wife and together we drove to the ceremony site. This wedding was arranged rather quickly, only because the couple is going to England on the 27th of this month and decided they wanted to be married before they left. So, with the appropriate permissions received, they were wed. And for the first time, in a very long time, I felt a sense of peace.

When I was on the drive back to my car we talked about being in relationship with the Divine. So often, when I talk to people, they tell me they are not religious. So, I gently or sometimes not so gently, ask them what being religious means to them. And without exception, "religious" to them means being rigid, focussed more on doctrine than relationship. In many ways they are describing the religious authorities in Jesus' time. Jesus never set about to form a new religion, in fact, he wanted to REFORM his faith...being a rabbi from Judea. He wanted people to be more important than rules.

For the past several weeks the gospel has been stuck on repeat...bread of life. Living bread, eat this bread, this bread is my body. From our Gospel reading today, Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (John 6.51, NRSV)

Without context, this could look like cannibalism. "The bread that I will give for the life of the world IS MY FLESH." Ewww. This kind of pondering leads to a very interesting question..."the Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" (John 6.52, NRSV)

I mean, they have a great point. If they are looking at what Jesus said literally, it sounds like something very different than what we encounter when we receive Communion or Eucharist. For the sake of clarity, when I speak of Communion, or Eucharist, I am speaking of the same thing. Receiving a symbolic interpretation of Christ's body and blood, or bread and wine, or cracker and juice, or wafer and liqueur, or in some cases, cookies and milk.

Taking the words of Jesus literally is referred to as transubstantiation, receiving the literal body and blood, through the bread and wine, which has changed in its substance from bread and wine to body and blood. Again, for the sake of clarity, I do not refer to Communion or Eucharist as transubstantiation, nor do I refer to it as cannibalism.

Jesus is trying to get the community to understand that this brand new thing he is doing; giving his body and blood, is not literal. "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. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.'" (John 6.53-55, NRSV)

If I were new to this whole Jesus thing, I would be completely turned off of it all in hearing this. I mean, really, do you want a pound of Jesus' flesh? Where from, because pretty soon he's going to be a discarded skeleton. And drink his blood? What kind of pagan ritual is this? I'm just kidding. Pagans do not drink blood. Their rituals predominantly are about living in relationship or "communion" with nature.

Cannibalism is still practiced in select parts of Papua New Guinea, Fiji, India, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cambodia, French Polynesia, Liberia, Rotenburg - Germany, and Miami - Florida. [Here is the link to the article.](#)

Jesus said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6.56-58, NRSV)

He's NOT being literal. Jesus is telling his followers that if they want to truly follow him...if they want to truly know him, they need to stop taking things literally and lean into the metaphor of the image. It's not the food that spoils that they need for eternal life. It is the metaphorical body and blood.

For me, I am a Receptionist when it comes to these things. I believe there IS a substantive change that happens when I receive Communion or the Eucharist...but that CHANGES comes from WITHIN. The change is in me, not in the elements I consume. When I RECEIVE them, I change.

Many of my colleagues struggle with virtual Communion or what they refer to as Spiritual Eucharist. For me, because Communion also refers to the gathering of the community, and because Eucharist also means thanksgiving, being together in a virtual space; while not the same as being together in person, is a perfectly reasonable substitute in the absence of "the real thing".

The same as the experience of being together online, is not the same as being together in person, but it is a perfectly reasonable substitute. Eighteen months ago I would have strongly disagreed with this statement, but having lived it for the past seventeen months, I see things differently and in some cases much more clearly now.

Yesterday I presided at a funeral for a woman who was predeceased by both her son and daughter. Just prior to her daughter's death she learned she had ALS. Her life was never easy, divorced with two young children, her son dying in his early 30's and her daughter dying in her late 30's. I remember this lady's young grandson, who was 15 or 16 when his Mum died. He didn't know what to do with himself. He felt he had nobody left, except his Dad and his Grandma.

I saw him yesterday and he's grown about a foot. He's now 21 years old, is engaged to be married and has a two month old daughter who is named for her grandmother, his mother. And I swear when I looked at the baby photos on his phone, his wee baby girl is the spitting image of her grandmother. It was then that I noticed the baby spit up on his shirt, which he had noticed just before he got to Cherished Memories. He was apologising, I thought it was simply parenting.

Victoria is fed and watered, she's clean and changed, so what if he has a bit of spit up on his shirt. It'll wash. She'll never be two months old again. And he does realise he'll never get a full night's sleep again. He looked utterly exhausted and devastated that his grandmother died, yet also looked deliriously happy with his baby daughter, his fiance and the life they have together. AND, there may be another wedding in my future.

Standing with this strapping young man, watching him smile through tear-stained cheeks as I begged to see baby photos, I felt a great sense of peace for the first time in a long time.

Because you see, it's these things that feed my soul.

I may get into trouble for saying this...but I find myself closer to the Divine when I'm out in Creation. I can feel moved to tears hearing the swell of an organ in a vast Cathedral. I can also feel enveloped in the care and love of a small square building with a hastily assembled altar in the corner.

Yet where I find myself able to open my soul - to the very inner core, is when I am in Creation. Not a busy city street, or surrounded by concrete, blacktop and glass, but a quiet place where the only outside sound is that of water lapping, wind blowing and birdsong. No bugs, though, DEFINITELY no bugs.

For me, I encounter the Divine where I go. I don't bring God with me. I may walk in the steps of Jesus, but I will never stand in His sandals. I may hear the Holy Spirit in the song of wind that she whispers as I walk. But I don't bring Her with me, She is already there.

And as that is for me, it is also for you. May it be so.

So, I will ask you again,

What feeds you?

Not, what is your favourite meal, but what feeds your soul?

What feeds your heart?

What makes you deliriously happy?

It's these things you should chase, not riches or possessions or stuff.

Because the things will break down, or get forgotten or lose their significance. Yet the memories we carry of our human experiences as a spiritual being will live on long after we shed these earthly bodies.

As I said to one of the folks at the funeral, "I went to [Partsource](#) the other day and was disappointed to discover it's only car parts they carry. I thought they might have had a spare ankle or hip or wrist because mine have been bothering me and I hoped there might be a volume discount...you know three for the price of two kinda thing."

Anyway, in a few hours I will be on my way to the first leg of my vacation journey. I am ready to be "off work" and just "off" for a while. I'm not sure how I'm going to handle three weeks of not working. But I promise to do my best to come back, rested, refreshed and renewed.

I'm returning in time for our beloved buildings to reopen. And in between now and then there is much to do. But I'm not going to worry about that, because I have four very capable people looking after things...three lay leaders in our Parish and one lovely Roman Catholic Priest.

May you know peace, may you seek joy, may you share love. Amen.

John 6.51-58 - The Living Bread
Sermon for Pentecost 12 - 15 August 2021

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