

John 6:51-58 ⁵¹I 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." ⁵²Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³Jesus 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. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just 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. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

THE CHILDREN'S SERMON IS MENTIONED AT THE END OF THIS SERMON IN A WAY THAT IT MAY BE HELPFUL TO HEAR WHAT I SAID TO THE CHILDREN, WHICH WENT SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

A MAN AND HIS SON WERE WALKING ON THE BEACH ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON. THE BOY ASKED ABOUT WORD HE HEARD IN WORSHIP-THAT JESUS LIVES INSIDE US AND WE LIVE IN HIM. HE ASKED HIS FATHER HOW THIS COULD BE TRUE. THE MAN SAID HE NEEDED TO THINK ABOUT A WAY TO EXPLAIN IT.

THE TWO CONTINUE THEIR WALK UNTIL THEY SAW A PLASTIC BOTTLE FLOATING IN THE OCEAN, NEAR SHORE. THE MAN PICKED UP THE BOTTLE TO RECYCLE IT, AND IT GAVE HIM AN IDEA.

HE UNSCREWED THE CAP AND FILLED IT WITH SOME OF THE SEA WATER. THEN REPLACES THE CAP AND LAID IT IN THE WAVES. THEN HE POINTED OUT TO HIS SON THE SEA WAS INSIDE THE BOTTLE AND THE BOTTLE WAS IN THE SEA. THIS IS LIKE HOW JESUS LIVES IN US AND WE LIVE IN HIM.

THERE IS MODERN PARABLE ABOUT A MAN WHO DECIDED HE WOULD TRY TO OUTSMART GOD, AND SO HE ASKED:

"LORD, WHAT IS A 1000 YEARS TO YOU?" THE ANSWER HE HEARD WAS: "ABOUT A SECOND."

NEXT, THE MAN INQUIRED, "WHAT IS A MILLION DOLLARS TO YOU?" "IT IS LIKE A PENNY", GOD REPLIED.

AFTER HEARING THIS THE MAN PRAYED: "LORD, GIVE ME ONE OF YOUR PENNIES." AND GOD ANSWERED: "I WOULD BE GLAD TO, JUST WAIT A SECOND."

WISDOM, AS THE STORY IS MEANT TO TEACH, IS NOT FOUND IN TRYING TO MANIPULATE OR OUTSMART GOD, BUT RATHER LIVING IN REVERENCE FOR AND OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD.

PSALM 111 CONTAINS A POWERFUL MESSAGE THAT CONNECTS TO THIS, AS WELL AS TO, TODAY'S GOSPEL PASSAGE.

LET'S LISTEN TO IT: "...THE LORD IS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL. HE PROVIDES FOOD FOR THOSE WHO FEAR HIM; HE IS EVER MINDFUL OF HIS COVENANT..."

THE LORD SENT REDEMPTION TO HIS PEOPLE; HE HAS COMMANDED HIS COVENANT FOREVER.

HOLY AND AWESOME IS HIS NAME. THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM...."

FOOD AND REDEMPTION ARE ALSO THE THEME OF JESUS' MESSAGE IN THE READING FROM JOHN CHAPTER SIX.

THE WORDS OF THE SAVIOR RECORDED THERE, ABOUT HIS FLESH AND BLOOD, ARE INTENDED REFLECT GOSPEL READERS BACK TO CHAPTER ONE.

THERE IT IS WRITTEN: "AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US, AND WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY, THE GLORY OF A FATHER'S ONLY SON, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH."

JESUS, IS THE WORD WHO BECAME FLESH, AND IT IS TO THIS WORD, TO JESUS, WE MUST BE JOINED IN ORDER TO HAVE LIFE EVERLASTING.

JESUS CALLS OUR ATTENTION TO THIS IN JOHN 6:57: "JUST AS THE LIVING FATHER SENT ME, AND I LIVE BECAUSE OF THE FATHER, SO WHOEVER EATS ME WILL LIVE BECAUSE OF ME."

UNFORTUNATELY, THE MEANING OF THE SAVIOR'S WORDS IS NOT AS CLEAR AS WE MIGHT LIKE.

IT IS NO WONDER PEOPLE WERE CONFUSED AND DISTURBED TO HEAR JESUS SAY:

"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."

OF COURSE CHRISTIANS TEND TO VIEW CHRIST'S WORDS AS A REFERENCE TO THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION, SO WE DO NOT GET PARTICULARLY UPSET BY THEM.

AND WHILE ON ONE LEVEL WHAT JESUS SAID IN THIS PASSAGE CAN BE UNDERSTOOD AS A REFERENCE TO THE SACRAMENT HE WOULD LATER INSTITUTE, ON A MORE LITERAL LEVEL IT IS NOT.

YOU SEE, IF WE TAKE HIS WORDS LITERALLY, WE SHOULD BE DISTURBED BY HIS STATEMENT ABOUT HAVING LIFE ONLY IF WE EAT AND DRINK OF HIM IN THE SACRAMENT.

THIS IS TRUE, BECAUSE TO TAKE HIS WORDS LITERALLY COULD BE INTERPRETED TO MEAN -UNLESS WE PARTAKE OF THE SACRAMENT WE ARE NOT SAVED.

THAT, OF COURSE IS NOT TRUE, SINCE WE ARE SAVED BY JESUS' SACRIFICE AND NOT SIMPLY BY SHARING IN THE SACRAMENTS.

REMEMBER, WHILE BOTH HOLY BAPTISM AND HOLY COMMUNION ARE VALUABLE AND PRECIOUS, THEY ARE MERELY MEANT TO DRAW US TO JESUS - THE SOURCE OF OUR SALVATION.

A HINT OF WHAT JESUS WAS POINTING TOWARDS WHEN HE SPOKE ABOUT EATING HIS FLESH AND DRINKING HIS BLOOD- IS FOUND IN WHAT HE SAID ABOUT BEING TRUE FOOD AND DRINK.

THE WORD "TRUE" CONTAINS THE SENSE OF BEING HEALTHY RATHER THAN JUNK FOOD. OF COURSE BOTH WILL SUSTAIN LIFE TO A POINT.

HOWEVER JUNK FOOD DOES NOT CONTAIN THE SAME NUTRITIONAL VALUE, NOR PROVIDE THE SAME DEGREE OF ENERGY AS HEALTHY FOOD.

THERE IS THE ADDITIONAL PROBLEM WITH UNHEALTHY ADDITIVES IN JUNK FOOD THAT ARE NOT GOOD FOR US.

SO WHILE JUNK FOOD MAY NOT BE TOO BAD IF EATEN ONLY ON OCCASION, AS A MAIN DIET, IT WILL MORE LIKELY HARM US, RATHER THAN HELP US.

JESUS IS SAYING SOMETHING SIMILAR CONCERNING OUR SPIRITUAL NUTRITION.

HE IS SAYING WE NEED A GOOD SPIRITUAL DIET WITHOUT ARTIFICIAL INGREDIENTS.

TRULY, JESUS IS THE ONE IN WHOM WE CAN FIND THE FOOD OF LIFE, WHICH INCLUDES TRUE FULFILLMENT, AND ETERNAL LIFE.

THINK ABOUT IT: THERE ARE MANY OTHER THINGS BOTH FAITH RELATED AND WORLDLY THAT CAN FILL THE VOID WITHIN OUR LIFE AND SOUL.

HOWEVER, WHILE THEY CAN MEET SUCH NEEDS FOR A WHILE, NONE, BUT JESUS, CAN SUSTAIN US SPIRITUALLY TO THE DEGREE AND EXTENT WE NEED.

WHAT THE GOSPEL PASSAGE IS TRYING TO GET US TO HEAR AND UNDERSTAND IS THAT WE RECEIVE THE LIFE GOD INTENDS FOR US TO HAVE THROUGH OUR BOND WITH CHRIST.

IT IS IN THIS BOND, IN THE MINGLING OF OUR LIFE WITH JESUS AND HIS LIFE THAT WE ARE BORN ANEW, REDEEMED AND MADE WHOLE.

OUR REDEMPTION THROUGH CHRIST IS NOT JUST A FUTURE HOPE OF LIFE AFTER PHYSICAL DEATH, BUT IS PART OF OUR LIVING IN THE FLESH ON EARTH.

LIVING IN CHRIST, WHO LIVES IN US IS A UNION THAT CREATES A BOND SO STRONG NOT EVEN PHYSICAL DEATH CAN BREAK IT.

THIS IS WHAT JESUS DIRECTS ATTENTION TO WHEN HE SAID: "THOSE WHO EAT MY FLESH AND DRINK MY BLOOD ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN THEM."

HIS WORDS BOTH INVITE AND CHALLENGE US TO GRASP HOLD OF THE LIFE HE OFFERS, BY SEEKING HIM AS THE PROMISED FOOD FOR LIFE.

AND THE WAY IN WHICH HE MADE HIS OFFER POSSIBLE FOR US TO RECEIVE IT, WAS BY THE GIVING OF HIS LIFE ON THE CROSS.

THUS IT WAS IN THE BREAKING OF HIS BODY AND THE SHEDDING OF HIS BLOOD THAT LIFE IS FOUND.

IN JOHN 6:51, JESUS SAYS WHOEVER EATS THE BREAD HE PROVIDES WILL LIVE FOREVER, AND THE BREAD HE GIVES FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD IS HIS FLESH.

TO EAT HIS FLESH AND DRINK HIS BLOOD MEANS FOR US TO HAVE FAITH IN JESUS, WHICH INCLUDES BELIEVING IN HIS DEATH, AND THE PURPOSE OF HIS SACRIFICE.

ANOTHER WAY TO EXPLAIN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS THE SAY IT IS FOUNDED ON THE LIFE, OR FLESH OF JESUS, GIVEN FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD.

WE, BY FAITH, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT SENT TO US, JOIN OUR LIVES WITH CHRIST'S LIFE, WHEN WE BELIEVE IN THE PURPOSE OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

WE ALSO TAKE IN THE SALVATION AND LIFE, JESUS PROVIDES. AND THAT MAKES US HEIRS OF THE NEW COVENANT IN HIS BLOOD.

CHAPTER SIX IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CONTAINS THIS ON-GOING THEME OF JESUS AS THE TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

HE IS THE ONE WHO PROVIDES THE FOOD OF LIFE THAT RESULTS IN OUR REDEMPTION, AND THUS SUSTAINS LIFE IN US, NOT JUST NOW, BUT ETERNALLY.

BUT IN ORDER FOR OUR SAVIOR TO DO THIS FOR US, OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST NEEDS TO BE HANDS-ON RATHER THAN MERELY INTELLECTUAL.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO: LISTEN TO, ADMIRE, OR EVEN FOLLOW HIS TEACHINGS, WE NEED TO SEEK JESUS HIMSELF.

INDEED, IF WE ONLY KNOW JESUS SUPERFICIALLY, THAT IS - AS A FIGURE IN THE BIBLE, OR ON THE CROSS, SOMETHING IS MISSING.

IN ORDER TO BE SPIRITUALLY NOURISHED BY CHRIST, WE MUST ALLOW JESUS TO COME OUT OF THE BIBLE AND DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND TOUCH OUR HEARTS.

WE MUST SEEK HIM AS THE FOOD OF LIFE, THE SOURCE OF OUR REDEMPTION.

INDEED, IT IS IN PERSONAL CONTACT THAT FORMS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE CHRISTIAN, SO THAT BOTH ARE BONDED- ONE TO THE OTHER.

WHEN WE JOIN OUR LIFE WITH CHRIST, WE BECOME A NEW CREATION, AND THAT BEGINS THE PROCESS OF LIVING IN HIM, AND JESUS LIVING IN US.

THINK ABOUT GENESIS CHAPTER TWO, WHERE ADAM SPOKE AFTER EVE WAS CREATED FROM HIS RIB.

ADAM SAID, "THIS AT LAST IS BONE OF MY BONES AND FLESH OF MY FLESH; THIS ONE SHALL BE CALLED WOMAN."

TO PARAPHRASE HIS WORDS IN THE CONTEXT OF JESUS AND US, THE SAVIOR COULD SAY ABOUT THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM AS LORD AND SAVIOR:

"NOW THIS ONE'S SPIRIT IS ONE WITH MY SPIRIT, THIS ONE'S HEART IS TRANSFORMED BY MY HEART, THIS ONE'S LIFE IS FOUND IN MY LIFE. THIS ONE SHALL BE CALLED CHRISTIAN"

THERE IS OF COURSE A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LIVES OF ADAM AND EVE AND OUR LIFE IN CHRIST.

IN GENESIS TWO, NEW LIFE CAME FROM SEPARATION, WHILE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST COMES THROUGH JESUS JOINING HIS LIFE WITH OURS.

IN THIS WAY HE RESTORES OUR PERSONAL AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OUR CREATOR, WHICH WAS BROKEN BY SIN.

ST. PATRICK WROTE A PRAYER THAT DESCRIBED HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THIS UNION, AND EXPRESSED THE DESIRE TO FULLY EXPERIENCE WHAT JESUS PROMISED.

HERE IS A PORTION OF HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN CHRIST, AND TO HAVE CHRIST LIVE IN US:

"CHRIST WITH ME, CHRIST BEFORE ME,
CHRIST BEHIND ME, CHRIST IN ME.

CHRIST BENEATH ME, CHRIST ABOVE ME,
CHRIST ON MY RIGHT, CHRIST ON MY LEFT,
CHRIST WHERE I LIE, CHRIST WHERE I SIT,
CHRIST WHERE I ARISE...."

OF COURSE NONE OF US FULLY EXPERIENCE THE GOAL OF THIS PRAYER, WHILE ON EARTH, SINCE OUR LIFE IN CHRIST, LIKE OUR BIRTH INTO THE WORLD, INVOLVES FURTHER GROWTH.

AND YET THE PRAYER IS HELPFUL BECAUSE IT REMINDS US TO LOOK FOR CHRIST'S PRESENCE AS A PART OF OUR LIFE, WHICH IS AS INSEPARABLE FROM IT, AS IS OUR OWN SELF.

THE ILLUSTRATION FROM THE CHILDREN'S SERMON MAY BE HELPFUL TO REMIND US HOW IT IS POSSIBLE FOR US TO BE INSEPARABLE FROM JESUS, AND WE STILL REMAIN OUR OWN PERSON.

THINK AGAIN ABOUT OF THE FILLING A BOTTLE WITH WATER AND SEALING IT, THEN PLACING THE BOTTLE INTO WATER.

THE WATER SURROUNDS THE BOTTLE, AND IS ALSO WITHIN THE BOTTLE.

IT IS LIKE-THE BOTTLE BECOMES ONE WITH THE WATER AND THE WATER WITH THE BOTTLE.

AND YET, THE BOTTLE REMAINS A BOTTLE, AND THE WATER REMAINS WATER.

THIS IS NOT UNLIKE BEING JOINED TOGETHER WITH JESUS, WHO GAVE HIS LIFE FOR OUR SAKES, AND TOOK IT UP AGAIN WHEN HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

THE BIBLE SAYS THAT CHRISTIANS DIE TO OUR OLD SELVES AND ARE RAISED IN CHRIST, AND THUS ARE BONDED TO HIM.

THE REMINDER OF THE BENEFITS OF THIS BOND IS EXPRESSED IN MANY HYMNS, INCLUDING A VERSE OF "HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION.

THE VERSE PROCLAIMS ABOUT THOSE WHO RECEIVE THE FOOD OF LIFE JESUS OFFERS:

"THE SOUL THAT ON JESUS HATH LEANED TO REPOSE, I WILL NOT, I WILL NOT DESERT TO ITS FOES; THAT SOUL, THOUGH ALL HELL SHOULD ENDEAVOR TO SHAKE, I'LL NEVER, NO, NEVER, NO, NEVER FORSAKE."

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THE WONDERFUL GIFT OF REDEMPTION AND NEW LIFE, JESUS, THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN, PROVIDES. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: JOHN 6:51-58

FOOD AND REDEMPTION ARE THE THEME OF JESUS' MESSAGE IN THE READING FROM JOHN CHAPTER SIX. THE WORDS OF THE SAVIOR RECORDED THERE, ABOUT HIS FLESH AND BLOOD, ARE INTENDED REFLECT GOSPEL READERS BACK TO CHAPTER ONE.

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