

## **“Bread of Life”**

**Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, March 2, 2014**

**New Testament Lesson: John 6:47-59**

**Old Testament lesson: Deuteronomy 8:1-3**

In our New Testament lesson today, Jesus enters the synagogue and says, “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will 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,” Jesus said this, speaking of himself, his flesh and blood.

And while we know that Jesus is not literally talking about us eating his flesh, for the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestinians, this was prior to Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper; prior to his instructing us to partake in the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. So they had no clue what he was talking about.

In fact, John tells us, “The Jews (the religious leaders) ... disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” We know the answer – spiritually. Spiritually is how we partake in the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know the answer – or do we?

Anybody, what did Jesus mean when he said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life...?” We’ve got a notion about it; it has something to do with the afterlife with God in heaven. And that eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood has to do with the Sacrament of Communion. But do we really know how all of this works?

Of course not. And we’re not going to get it all figured out today, I’ll tell you that much. The Lord’s Supper is a mystery that the greatest minds and purest hearts and most devoted souls have struggled with since time immemorial.

But hey, let’s take a crack at it anyway, shall we? Maybe we can explore Jesus’ teaching about partaking in his Sacred body and blood and come away with a deeper sense of what this means to those of us who will be partaking in the Lord’s Supper a little bit later this morning.

Let’s start by looking at what the body and blood of Christ are not. There’s a new TV series on Fox called “Rake.” It’s about a lawyer who struggles with his own social and behavioral daemons – his misguided and sinful ways. But in the midst of his personal struggle, he also helps people who are equally misguided and who have found themselves in some legal crisis.

A couple of weeks back, the show was about a man who committed cannibalism. He ate human flesh.

As it turns out, he didn't kill anybody (the other guy committed suicide) and cannibalism in this country in itself is not against the law. So the lawyer, Keegan Deane, is working to keep his client out of prison. He's hoping to get him the psychiatric help he needs. Deane puts this man – his name is Graham Murray – on the witness stand. He begins by noting that Graham is a very smart man. As the mayor's economic advisor, Graham helped saved the city from financial ruin – prior to his act of cannibalism. He's an upstanding member of his church, notes Deane, saying to Graham – for the benefit of the jury – “You are a respected, laudable, upstanding cannibal.” Well, why listen to me tell you about it? Let's watch.

“You didn't kill Paul Wilson, did you?” asks Deane. “No,” testifies Graham, “he committed suicide.” “So you don't fit the (serial killer) mold, it wasn't a religious sacrifice; it wasn't like there wasn't anything else to eat in Los Angeles. Why, Graham? I mean all of us, we just, everybody, want to know why.” To which Graham says, “I was hungry, not in that I needed food, hungry in that I needed an answer.” “The Mona Lisa, Michelangelo's David, Botticelli's The Birth of Venus, what are they if they are not testimonies to the enduring beauty and glory of our own flesh. So why not take this wondrous thing – the flesh of another person – and make it part of me.”

What Graham is searching for here, I have no idea. But wouldn't it be interesting if in his testimony – as a character in this TV show – Graham actually learned something about himself that is helpful for us in exploring our connection to Christ, to one another, and to God, our connection in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Graham continues his testimony about eating human flesh asking, “Wouldn't there be some kind of transfer of spirit, or at the very least an increased sensitivity, or a heightened awareness, or perhaps just a feeling, a feeling of perfection, of ecstasy, of perfect calm.” “Huh, I have my answer now,” says Graham, as he sits there, reflecting on his actions, actions that have ruined his marriage, taken away his freedom, and cost him his mental and spiritual health. “Everything I needed to know about flesh,” he says, “I knew a long time ago. Perfection was my wife Annie's hand covering my own, ecstasy was the taste of her lips on mine, simple calm was what I felt when I had my hand against the hollow of her back.” “And now all of that is gone. So,” says Graham ending his testimony, “seems that I'm not quite as smart as you think, Mr. Deane.”

Well, our New Testament Lesson today shows us that we are not quite as smart as we think, when it comes to our understanding of the Lord's Supper. “The Jews,” says John, “disputed among themselves saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’”

And we as modern-day Christians still question among ourselves – and in our own heart and soul – about the meaning and power of the Lord’s Supper. Admit it; you have questions about that.

But Jesus really does lay it all out for us. Not that we can fully understand it, but we have been given in Scripture what we need to know when we are partaking in the Body of Christ. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood,” says Jesus, “abide in me, and I in them.”

Now that sounds like something close to what that poor soul Graham in the FOX TV show was after – abiding in someone and him in us. Jesus continues, “Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.”

Living because of Jesus. This could mean either we get our very life from Jesus or that Jesus is the reason we do anything in life in the first place, the reason for our living. Actually, it could mean both, and does.

We get our life from God through Jesus Christ, and Jesus is the reason life is worth living, in both good times and bad. Abiding in Christ – living in Christ. This means that in this world, we live – or die – based on our faith and where our faith leads us, even if that’s all the way to the cross.

Now of course, the crosses we bear are nothing like the cross that Jesus carried and hung from; the cross he died on and rose from. But if we live in Christ and Christ in us, God will raise us up from the crosses we do bear – whether our cross to bear is financial, relational, physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. Nothing in this world – not even death itself – can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Abiding in Christ and having Christ abide in us means having Jesus closer to us than anyone could possibly image. It is to develop a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that provides us the safety of the securest home we could ever imagine.

Nothing can get to us when we abide in Christ. And nothing comes closer to us – nothing can get in between us and God – when it is Christ who abides in us. So ultimately, abiding in Christ means taking our rest in Jesus. It means that our confidence in life comes from following his way.

The Lord’s Supper. “This is the bread that came down from heaven,” says Jesus, “not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” What Jesus means by living forever, I don’t completely understand. I can’t fully image what heaven is really like.

Oh, I've got faith that heaven is my promises – our promise – of an afterlife with God forever, and that in Christ, we can never be completely separated from God or our loved ones who are also in Christ. I don't fully understand it. But I do believe it. "Very truly, I tell you," says Jesus, "whoever believes (that I am the bread of life) has eternal life."

Thank God that Jesus does not ask me – ask us – to understand, but only to believe. And if that's enough for Jesus, it's enough for me, only believe and you shall be saved.

I told you at the outset of this sermon that we were not going to get it all figured out today. And I hope that's OK with you. But what we have learned is that to partake of the Lord's Supper is to live your life because of Jesus. It is to have Jesus closer to you, individually, than anything else in all the world. And that to partake of the Lord's Supper – really partake of it spiritually with all our heart and soul and mind – is to take our rest in Jesus.

When you receive the Lord's Supper today, receive it with me knowing that you will never fully understand all that it offers you. Receive it knowing that, even so, the promises it does offer are enough – apart from your own understanding, apart from our collective knowledge as human beings.

Friends, in the words of Jesus Christ, "this is the bread that came down from heaven. ... Anyone who eats this bread will live forever."  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Jesus, we are hungry for your bread and thirsty for your living waters. But sometimes our lack of faith is like a person with a cold who passes a bakery and cannot smell the baking bread.

Still we thank you that in proportion to our faith, our hearts and minds are opened to you, and we are fed and nourished.

May our faith grow, so that nourished by your bread and water, we may nourish others.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, even as we turn our eyes skyward and lift our voices in song, praying as you taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.