

Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 6:51-58

⁵¹I 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.” ⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So 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. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This 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.”

INGESTING JESUS

We have been exploring, over the last three weeks, just what it means that Jesus is “the bread of life.” Two weeks ago we understood the bread of life in terms of Holy Communion, Jesus inviting all of us to eat his flesh and drink his blood, an invitation to join Jesus at the dinner table, but an invitation that includes others who are just as welcome as we are and who we are obliged to welcome as well. We also came to understand the bread of life as the Church, as us, the body of Christ who have eternal life in Christ and who are commissioned to bring eternal life to those outside the church. Today we will see just how important it is to eat Jesus’ body and drink his blood, and how we experience eternal life when we ingest Jesus.

That is a grotesque image isn’t it? Eating Jesus’ body and drinking his blood is stuff you’d associate with television series like *Twilight* or *The Walking Dead*. The funny thing is that Jesus meant for the image to be repulsive. Why? Because he wants to drive in the point of just how radical a decision it is to be a committed disciple. These days we talk about our religion as the way we are raised, where we were baptized, and what Sunday School we attended. If you grew up in Bethel, you’re Methodist. If you attended Our Lady Star of the Sea you’re Catholic. But when Jesus is speaking to folks who are interested in following him, he doesn’t talk about confirmation classes or weekly worship attendance. He says things like, “If anyone wishes to be my disciple, let them take up their cross daily and follow me.” He says, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” He says,

“the greatest among you is the one who serves the most.” And he says, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

In other words, following Jesus is a whole lot more involved than attending church. It’s the sort of decision that affects everything in your life. Because you subordinate everything else to Jesus Christ. It’s as radical a move as eating flesh and drinking blood, and most people refuse to do it. We may sing songs like, “All to Jesus I Surrender” and “Lord, I Offer My Life to You,” but these are usually not sincere pledges; we should rather sing, “I Surrender Some,” and “Lord, I Offer an hour on Sunday morning to You.” That’s who we are. So often we want Jesus to dwell in us when we think we need him, and only when we think we need him. Like when we see the light come on on the police car behind us, or when we are going to a job interview or to a doctor’s appointment. The rest of the time we feel that we can get by just fine without him. We don’t want to ingest Jesus’ flesh and blood; we want to keep a picture of him in our purses and wallets, something we can show people when the time seems right. But Jesus’ words should be ringing in our ears: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

The honest truth is that most people in the world have no life in them. Well, what do you mean, Pastor Matt? I see them moving and breathing, laughing, joking, eating, working, planning, sneezing, picking their noses. Aren’t they alive? NOT SPIRITUALLY. The people are dead in the sense that they pursue the same vain pleasures that fail to satisfy the human spirit and actually prevent us from living what Jesus calls AN ABUNDANT LIFE. When our hearts and minds are set upon things that are dead, and those things replace a relationship with the living God, we become separated spiritually from the very source of life, and thus we too are dead.

Paul illustrates this point in the passage we read from Ephesians. “Be careful then,” Paul writes, “how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.” Most people don’t know how to make the most of their time: they are either constantly rushing around trying to get everything done or they convince themselves that they have all the time in the world to live their lives, ignoring the truth that everyone’s time on this earth is limited. They’re either stressed by the feeling that they don’t have enough time, or they’re blissfully ignorant of their own mortality, of the fact that their lives will end.

But a Christian is different. A Christian understands that their time on this earth is limited, and she can be a good steward of time, taking every opportunity to live boldly in service to God, taking every opportunity to advance the causes of peace and justice, compassion and kindness, forgiving others when the need arises, serving others when the need is apparent, LIVING LIFE IN the SPIRIT, IN THE PRESENT, AND ASSURED THAT SHE RESTS IN CHRIST.

Because the days are evil – we cannot deny that there is evil afoot, but we cannot deny that God created this world as a good place and that his plan is for it to once again be completely good. And you and I are the instruments for God to make that happen. YOU AND I ARE THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE ARMS AND LEGS AND EYES AND EARS OF CHRIST THAT MAKE POSITIVE CHANGES IN THIS WORLD.

It's quite clear to me that God is very patient with human beings, and so we need not be anxious about solving all the problems of the world in one day; we need only work with the time that God gives us and in place that God puts us.

And because we dwell in Christ and Christ dwells in us, we have eternal life. We're not anxious about past or future. We live in the present, in Christ, and we trust that we will dwell with him eternally. And that kind of makes us a little punch drunk – "Filled with the Spirit," as Paul describes it. When you are in that state of dwelling in Christ, you might seem a little bit drunk, People might catch you singing hymns or giving thanks at all times and in all circumstances - so the police officer wrote me a speeding ticket: "Thank you, Lord! Now I'll pay more attention to how fast I'm going."

But it's impossible to feel that kind of joy apart from being filled with the Spirit of God. Some people try drugs and alcohol People take these substances because they are looking for a joy that their current lifestyle doesn't provide them. So they think that altering their brain function will bring them joy. Usually what they end up with is a hangover and deteriorating health. Some people try money or cars or clothes or vacations. Some people try power or education or title or fame. All these things may satisfy our hunger temporarily, but only Jesus, the bread of life, satisfies our true hunger. Only Jesus, the bread of life, leads us to experience eternal life.

Today we will not have the Service of Bread and Table, but we may choose to have Holy Communion. We may choose to abide in Christ as he abides in us. We may choose to be united with Jesus and with one another. We may choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to consume the body and blood of Jesus Christ - that is the essence of Holy Communion – not a piece of bread dipped into a cup of grape juice – those are symbols of something much greater. Those are symbols of our decision to actually eat Jesus' body and drink his blood, to ingest him so that in every sense HE ABIDES IN US, Guiding our actions, directing our footsteps. My prayer for you this morning is that you would be filled with the Holy Spirit. It begins with a decision to repent and to commit yourself to Christ. It's a decision that you will never regret: it may get you into trouble, but you'll never regret it. It's a decision that leads to a transformation; things don't just magically happen. You'll need to change lots of things, and that does take time. But little by little, step by step, inch by inch, you'll find yourself following Jesus. You'll lose your fears. You'll gain true life. And you will never, ever be hungry again.