

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

August 16, 2015

Proper 15B/Ordinary 20B/Pentecost 12

The readings this week:

- 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:13-14 ◦ Psalm 111
- Ephesians 5:15-20 ◦ John 6:51-58

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

We Are What We Eat

Just in case you haven't "gotten it" after four weeks of bread-themed lessons, Jesus invites us into a way of living and being that is at once both wise and weird. It is wise by divine standards; in fact, it is not only wise but also "the way" to life abundant and everlasting. Yet by the world's standards this notion is wacky and weird. What Jesus proposes is a total life commitment that opposes the very foundations both of first century and twenty-first century culture.

Try to hear the words of Jesus from John's gospel without your "church" ears on. Eating flesh and drinking blood? Sounds suspiciously like cannibalism and vampirism doesn't it? The bare language is more than a bit revolting once we take off our rose-colored lenses of faith and theological understanding. Sure, we good church folk know there is much more to those words than what they literally say, but have we gone too far in sanitizing and sweetening them? In making them palatable and acceptable, have we watered down the real impact?

Let me ask you this: do the complex notions of consubstantiation and transubstantiation turn raw images and words into safe bits of bread and wine? Does a memorial supper celebration have the same impact of Jesus' words "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"? No matter your theological understanding of Christ's meal or what you call it, when we try to bury these words in our worship practice, we're missing an important part of what Jesus may be saying to us, because consuming Jesus doesn't happen only at the altar rail.

Living, breathing, and abiding in Christ's body each hour of every day is no wimpy way to live but rather is our countercultural calling as Christians. We are to show Christ to the world through our words and actions, every day of our lives both individually and as worshipping communities. Having consumed and been fueled by Christ into full communion, we in turn offer the experience of his saving grace and boundless love to others. We become "little Christs," part of the heavenly food chain and circle of endless and abundant life.

This means a whole lot more than one or two segmented hours once a week along with a bit of bread and sip of wine or juice. This means instead of devouring what the world tells us we need to consume—the latest fashions, the largest entertainment package, as much fast food as we want whenever we want it, bigger and better houses, anything to boost our perceived status and retail sales—we need to nourish body and soul with Jesus. We must be intimately acquainted with his words, his actions, his promises, and his love. We must dwell in his house, be part of his people as the Body of Christ, and allow our own will to be subsumed into the divine will. We are not our own, but we are what we eat.

Just as the United States is facing severe health, environmental, and economic crises caused by our poor choices, bad habits, and unbridled consumption, so too we face a spiritual crisis when we choose to feast on the lures and lies of the world rather than the promises of Christ.

Yes, we feast on Christ at the table, but we must make our very lives a banquet of hope, grace, and love. We are stewards of the Good News and consumers of Christ. We must live with a radical gratitude and a holy hunger, always willing to pull more chairs up to the table. If we are what we eat, then we'd better imbibe that grace, ask for seconds of our Lord's love, and pass the promises of God. Come to the feast! Come eat and live!

~ Sharron R. Blezard, [Stewardship for Life](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:13-14

Given the chance to ask God for anything (with the understanding that God will give what is asked), Solomon asks for the ability to discern between good and evil. Would that all leaders would ask for that gift! What would you ask for, really, if you could ask God for one gift? "It pleased the Lord" - what was the last thing you did that you think specifically "pleased God"? "Walk in my ways . . . as your father David walked" - whose ways do you walk in? Whose life is an example for you as David's was for Solomon? Bethquick.com

Psalm Reading: Psalm 111

The psalmist uses a broad term for the works of God so that the audience can reflect on the wide range of God's works. Only one work (food, v. 5) is mentioned. Identify and reflect on some of God's works. How has God provided for you this past year? In verse 7, the term precepts, *piqqudim*, which means "instructions," or "procedures," is sometimes associated with the term "upright" (v. 8). The psalmist seems to have constructed this psalm to focus on God's precepts. While it is easy to acknowledge God's precepts are trustworthy, at times, our actions reveal that we doubt God's promises. Identify a few of these precepts, commands, and promises that you doubt are true or trustworthy. How can you grow in your trust in the promises of God? Verse 10 echoes other wisdom literature on fearing God, what does fearing God mean to you? [The Rock Church](http://TheRockChurch)



Bread of Life, Kennedy Paiz

... We took our canoes to the river and just paddled for a couple of hours. The fresh air, the exercise, the wildlife, the water, the conversation, the friendship, all conspired to make me realize, once again, that I'm a terribly slow learner when it comes to rest and Sabbath.

When the apostle writes that "the days are evil," I take that to mean that day upon day upon day can be evil if we don't redeem the time. Sameness, boredom, work, heaviness, laboriousness. We redeem the time by filling it with things that give life to us and the people around us. Yes, sometimes that involves being efficient.

But I'm also reminded that making the most of our time often means an efficiency of the spirit, which might be a far notion from checking off lists.

How will you make the most of your time today?

~ From Making the Most of our Time, Melissa Bane Sevier

3rd Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20

As in last week's passage, Paul pairs several negative instructions ("don't do this...") with positive ones ("instead do this..."). Why is it important to put these kinds of instructions together? What do you think it means to "be careful how you live?" What does a carefully-lived life look like to you? How is wisdom related to making "the most of every opportunity?" What kinds of opportunities do you think Paul is referring to? Why would Paul point out that "the days are evil?" What do you think he means, and what might Paul say about our current "days?" Why do we sometimes attach a negative connotation to "submission" (verse 21)? Why is it such an important concept in the Body of Christ? What might Paul say to us today about this topic? Living Well, Faith Element Discipleship System

4th Reading: John 6:51-58

This text continues with week four of a month-long series of texts from John 6 that all talk about Jesus and bread and feeding and bread of life and living water, etc., etc. The imagery is rich and meaningful and can communicate a great deal. On the flip side, I remember preaching on these texts three years ago when I was just starting at my first appointment, and wondering if I would ever get to talk about something other than bread! "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Early Christians were sometimes accused of promoting cannibalism for their communion theology. Indeed, to an outsider, it would be hard to explain what our theology and symbolism meant. How would you do it? "You have no life in you" - we must be part of the body to have life. Compare this with the body imagery Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 12 to talk about spiritual gifts. When Jesus talks about living forever, what do you think he means, exactly? Life in heaven? A right here-right now eternal life? Bethquick.com

Praying Toward Sunday

Our Father, we pray that you will teach us to draw upon the well of water within, to know that every demand made upon us is a demand made upon you, and that you are prepared, ready, to live your life through us in every situation and thus manifest your grace. We thank you in Christ's name. Amen.

Ray C. Stedman