

11th Sunday after Pentecost Year B
August 20, 2006

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever had a certain food that you weren't particularly fond of eating? A response you might think of when that food is offered to you is, no thank you, I don't like it or I'm not eating that or Yuck, a response that parents often hear from their children.

For me, Chinese food is my yuck food. I've never been fond of it. I don't like the taste of it and I don't like the smell of it. Unfortunately for John, all he hears in the background when he's eating it at home, is yuck, when are you going to be done eating that? We all have foods that we don't like. And there are probably foods that we may not even try because of how they look or smell. Something about these foods make us shy away or say yuck.

Keeping in mind a certain food that you don't like to eat ~ think about how you might react if someone told you to eat their flesh so that you would live forever. It's probably something that might make you feel uncomfortable. I know for me personally if someone told me that I had to eat their flesh, even if it was someone that I was close to, I would be very uncomfortable and probably think that the person telling me this was a little crazy.

And of course, we do have someone telling us to eat his flesh, Sunday after Sunday. Jesus tells us, just as he told those gathered during his earthly life, to eat his flesh so that we will live forever.

Let's think about this. I can't even begin to imagine what the people thought when Jesus told them to eat his flesh. By the questions they asked one another ~ I think there was probably some skepticism ~ some thinking that Jesus may in fact be a little crazy. Unfortunately for those gathered during Jesus' earthly life, they did not have the understanding of eating Jesus' body and drinking Jesus' blood in bread and wine as we do. The crucifixion and the resurrection did not happen yet, which caused the anxiety and confusion of Jesus' statement.

We are fortunate. We live in a post resurrection world. We know what Jesus means when he says eat my flesh and drink my blood. Jesus means participating in Holy Communion or Eucharist.

I've participated in Holy Communion since I've been 10 years old. I know that as a Lutheran we believe that the bread and wine we receive during communion are the true presence, the real presence of Jesus. We eat Jesus' body and drink his blood, Sunday after Sunday in the bread and wine. Christ comes into each of us and nourishes us to do God's work in the world.

Jesus explains in today's gospel lesson what happens to those who eat his flesh and drink his blood:

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. 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

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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.”

Jesus gives us hope in the resurrection. If we take part in the sacrament of Holy Communion he says that we will live because he abides in us and we in him. In essence, when we receive communion we become “little Christs”.

I know that it’s something that might make one feel uncomfortable. I have to admit the first time I heard this from one of my seminary professors it was a little hard to swallow. But ~ after having some time to wrestle with being a “little Christ” it’s something that I hold as a wonderful gift of grace.

Christ being present with me through the bread and wine in such an intimate way means so much to me because it’s pure grace. God loves me – God loves us so much to be part of our lives. To live not only among us, but in each of us.

This is a great gift. What do we do with this gift? Do we hide Jesus in our daily living or do we show him to others? The bible challenges us to live our lives so that we might share Jesus with others. We are called to be disciples. To do the work of God in this world. We are called to pray and to listen to what God is calling us to do.

The lesson from Ephesians challenges our daily living practices. The lesson asks us to:

“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people, but as wise, making the most of time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are challenged as “little Christs” to live in a way to let God’s love shine through to others in our words and actions. We are called to be disciples. We are called to pray and discern what God is asking us to do. It isn’t always easy to be a disciple. In fact it can be difficult. We may be pushed outside our comfort zones to do what God is calling us to do. For example, we may feel uncomfortable helping someone in need that we don’t know. An experience of discomfort for me happened on internship. St. John’s was located on Harford road – one of the main streets in Baltimore. We had many individuals and families stop in for assistance. At first I just gave the people what they came for: a gift card for groceries or gas, or food – hoping that they would leave as fast as they came. After a great deal of prayer and conversations with my supervisor, I realized that I probably wasn’t helping as God called me to. I fulfilled a need for those who came ~ but was reluctant to find out their story. To listen to how they came to be in the situation they were in. Once I began doing this ~ I was able to help in other ways. I met with people and helped them put resumes together and encouraged them to work if they were able. To my surprise some were receptive to the conversations ~ others not so much, but for me it was one of the most valuable lessons for me to learn. In the beginning I was more concerned for my own safety, not praying and discerning how God would work through me. In one sense one could say

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that I let Jesus shine through just by giving those in need a gift card for the grocery store, but there was something missing. The piece that was missing was the love and compassion behind the action. The love that Jesus, that God has for all of us; the love that shines through in our actions because Jesus abides in us. Jesus is with us in all that we do. He cares for us and loves us, even if we make mistakes. God's love is unconditional. By God's grace he sent Jesus to die on the cross and raised him from the dead so that we will live.

We have much to be thankful for as God abides in each of us through the body and blood of his only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Let us be filled with the Spirit, praying and listening to God's call, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. AMEN.