

Sermon-Yr. B, Proper 15-John 6:51-58

When I was in electronics school in the Navy, I had an instructor who would stomp his foot whenever the information he was giving us was important. You could ignore his not-so-subtle hints if you wanted to, but it was guaranteed that the information at each foot stomp would show up on the next test. If you didn't get 100% on this instructor's tests it was your own fault.

This Sunday I can hear that foot stomp as loud as ever. From many different sources, the message is clear: This is important! Pay attention! The writers of the lectionary thought this message was so important that there are five Sundays in a row that we hear about bread and Jesus being the "bread of life." This is the fourth of those five Sundays. The writers of the lectionary are stomping their foot saying, "This is important! Pay attention!"

The repetitiveness of John's Gospel also tells us this is important. Jesus seemed to know that his message was something we, as humans, would not easily understand. He needed to be repetitive to hammer away at our defenses until we were able to comprehend that when he talks about bread, he is not talking about that which is made with flour, water, and yeast. He is talking about himself, who has come down from Heaven. With the repetitiveness of this section of John's Gospel, I can

hear the Gospel writer stomping his foot and saying, “This is important! Pay attention!”

Even the Church throughout history has a way of stomping its foot. I am guessing that many of us hearing today’s Gospel reading were not overly disturbed by the images of eating Jesus’ flesh or drinking his blood because we understand that language through the liturgy of the table – the Eucharist. Even there we have a tradition of ringing the sanctus bell. The ringing of the sanctus bell is a liturgical stomping of the foot telling us to pay attention and this is important.

All of this urges us to pay close attention to Jesus's words. If we do, we can see that Jesus was talking about more than eating bread at communion and drinking wine. His words go from metaphors and similes to hard truth, “...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 abide in me, and I in them.” For the early followers who heard those words, it was too much to understand and accept. The idea of drinking blood was against Levitical law. The law told them that when they ate meat they had to first drain the blood to the ground. They were not to eat the blood. Besides sounding a bit cannibalistic this teaching of Jesus was pushing the envelope of what the listeners could handle. They did not yet have the whole story. They had not yet

heard about the last supper, that we remember every Sunday at communion. They did not yet know that Jesus would die on the cross and that he would rise from the dead three days later. They struggled to make sense of Jesus's teachings because they did not have the information we have today. Many of them gave up and left, the teaching was too hard.

Two thousand years later we hear this same teaching but our response is very different. We get it. We have come together today to remember Jesus' death and resurrection. We have come to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood. In a few minutes, we will come to the altar rail and partake of the bread, a wafer, sometimes with a cross stamped in it, a symbol of Jesus's body. Then, we will drink the wine out of a silver chalice representing the blood of Jesus. It is all good, it is all very sterile, and it is something Jesus told us to do. But in today's reading, Jesus was talking about more than that. He was talking about something more than receiving communion on Sunday. He was talking about more than just being his followers. What he was saying was we must consume him to the point that he is a part of our very being.

When we consume food, the food is broken down and becomes a part of us. As our bodies break down the food, we receive the vitamins and minerals we need to survive. It strengthens our bones and

muscles. It becomes a very part of our being. This is what Jesus was talking about. William Willimon, in an article in *Feasting on the Word*, said, "Jesus intends to have all of us, body and soul. His truth wants to burrow deep within us, to consume us as we consume him, to flow through our veins, to be digested, to nourish every nook and cranny of our being." As Paul said to the Galatians, "and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:20) This is what Jesus was talking about.

This type of connection with God gives us life. A life that is connected to heaven through Jesus. A life that is able to withstand the ways of this world, which are often opposite of what God desires for us. All too often our lives are bombarded with the world's thoughts of how we should live. There are groups and individuals that encourage us to exclude others, fight back, hate, and hold power over others. However, when Jesus is a very part of our being, as he was with St. Francis, you hear of a life that is lived in a totally different way. We can hear of that way in a prayer St. Francis prayed. "Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy." He also prayed that we console, understand, and love each other. This is what Jesus taught and lived. This is what Jesus

desired for the world. As his followers, that is what we should want too. In truth, if you are like me, you can easily lose your focus and get caught up in worldly ways. Jesus knows that if we eat his flesh and drink his blood and take him into our very being we are strengthened and nourished for whatever life puts before us. Not necessarily making for an easy life but a good life, a life of peace and strength and joy. A life lived as Jesus would live it.

This kind of connection Jesus was talking about does not happen just by coming to church once a week, although it is a great start. Just as we need to eat food daily to keep our bodies healthy and strong, so we also need to feed on Jesus daily, taking him into our very being, through prayer, studying the Word, worship, and whatever nourishes your body and soul.

Jesus wants all of us and he wants us to have all of him. He wants us to live a good life. A life lived following his way, a way of love and caring and peace. A way that is an example to a very hurting world that there is another way to live, a way that leads to eternal life.

Now that is something to stomp your foot about!

Amen.