

Sermon for Sunday, August 26, 2018 - "All-Consuming"

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 26, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Jesus as the bread of life is a beautiful, powerful metaphor, but does anyone else feel they've had their fill of it? This is the fourth Sunday that we've heard about this. If we were strictly following the lectionary, the assigned pattern of scripture readings, this would be our fifth Sunday hearing about Jesus as the bread of life. We got to cut one Sunday out by having the kids lead us in the Global Church Sunday - another benefit of that wonderful day.

Today, more bread isn't the only thing that seems a little much, a little excessive. Jesus says some really strange things. He says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." And twice he talks about, "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood." If you heard these words without any context, you'd have to assume Jesus was talking about cannibalism. They are really unappetizing words. I prefer more palatable teachings about love and service and being kind. I'd rather avoid talk about flesh eating followers.

No wonder Jesus' first hearers disputed among themselves, asking, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? How can this be?"

If we spend a lot of time around the church, we sometimes forget how strange Jesus' words are until we put ourselves in the place of someone who hasn't domesticated or spiritualized them.

If we hear these words, as if for the first time, we realize that Jesus is making some pretty radical claims. Jesus is saying the God of the universe has come, in the flesh, so that we can consume God.

And that's pretty intense. Do we really want a God who is that close, that intimately involved in our lives?

This isn't a God who's just icing on the top of a good life - a light, fluffy, unobtrusive God. This is a God who wants to get under our skin, burrow within us, and seep into every nook and cranny of our beings.

This is not a God who stays at a safe distance sending down teachings, ideas and motivation. This a God who wants to get into every aspect of our lives. It almost sounds like God wants to consume us, to claim us, and change us from the inside out.

That's not the kind of God we'd likely choose off a menu. We'd often prefer a kind of comfort food God - warm, fuzzy, not too demanding. A God who wants to be consumed and to consume us is not all that appealing.

And yet, the good news of Jesus is that God doesn't wait until we desire or accept or believe or understand any of this. God just comes to us in Jesus. And Jesus gives his very self to feed us with what we most need.

God knows that on our own, we don't choose what we really need. We consume so many empty calories; we seek fulfillment in all sorts of things that leave us wanting. So, Jesus helps us to see how hungry and thirsty we are and awakens our yearning for God.

God knows that we are so often consumed by things that drain our life - consumed by worries, fears, anger, stress. So, Jesus helps us identify what's eating at us and sets us free from it. Jesus draws us into God's all-consuming love and abundance.

God knows that our patterns of consumption keep us focused inwards on our wants and pleasures. So, Jesus comes to turn us outward, towards our neighbor, so that our lives will nurture others.

Jesus gives himself so that we might have what we really need.

Jesus does this in all the ways he has promised. He is present when two or three are gathered in his name. When we meet in Jesus' name we become more than we are as individual parts - we become Christ's body for each other and the world.

Through this beautiful, broken, beloved body of Christ, God challenges us, gets under our skin, disturbs us and, at the same time, loves, feeds, blesses and transforms us. There are many, many times that the body of Christ - in the whole church and in this congregation- is not what we'd prefer. But, it is just what we need to receive abundant life and to be a life-giving presence in the world.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, also meets us as we hear and reflect on the words of scripture, as we sing, make music, pray, and share in silence. In all these ways Jesus frees and feeds us.

And Jesus comes to us in the bread and wine saying, "This is my body, this is my blood - given for you." He doesn't wait to see if we believe this or feel something about this. Jesus simply meets us where we are in a way that we can touch, smell, taste and see - in a way that can get into us.

Jesus also meets us out in the world, in the creation that feeds us, and in those the world considers least and the last; for he promises that how we treat those in need is how we treat him.

Jesus is present in, with and among us giving us what we need, even if it's not always what we'd choose.

Through Jesus' presence, God gets under our skin. God transforms us from the inside out.

Let's take a moment of silent prayer.

