

August 16, 2009 Sermon  
The Rev. Deacon Annie Fritschner

[1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14](#)

[Psalm 111](#)

[Ephesians 5:15-20](#)

**John 6:51-58**

Have you ever had that experience of being at a coffee hour or a business convention or at a cocktail party where you are engaged in a great conversation with someone you really like and have wanted to see, only they have a small piece of parsley or pepper stuck in their front tooth? And all you can do is stare at it? And your tongue starts working your own teeth to try to get it out for them. And of course it doesn't work and your friend or colleague could be telling you that you are receiving a million dollar raise or inviting you on a Caribbean vacation all expenses paid for two weeks and all you can do is look at the parsley? You can't hear a word your friend is saying.

And what has this got to do with today's Gospel lesson?? Everything! How often do we focus on the parsley and tune out the good news that is being shared? Or totally miss the beauty of the moment lost in a rabbit hole in our mind?

In case you are missing it, today is the 4<sup>th</sup> of 5 bread of life lessons we have had in a row. Do you think this is an important concept??

Rob, Maria and I do not request the text for preaching – we have established a schedule and then we discover what the texts are. And I happened to get this lesson today because the Holy Spirit is inviting me to deal with language I absolutely abhor! Washed in the blood of the lamb. Saved by the blood. Redeemed by Jesus' blood. So many signs and crosses in the south have blood references on them. Eat my flesh – drink my blood. This language is my parsley - I can get lost in the hideousness of it rather than keeping focused on the great invitation to be fed and nourished by God.

In today's Gospel lesson Jesus is speaking to a group of Jews who would easily relate to the concept of being 'saved by the blood'. The Jews had sacred stories about the time when the Israelites were saved from the angel of death. The blood of a lamb was painted over the doors of their houses and when the angel of death saw this blood, he would pass over that house, not killing the first born. In other words, the next and future generation of Jews – the first born – was literally saved from death by the blood of the lamb. And Jesus' audience would know this text and reference to Exodus from their Torah. The Israelites were only spared from Pharaoh's final plague by sacrificing the lamb and this is what Passover celebrates – the time the Jews were saved from death by the blood of the Pascal lamb.

Jesus' message to the gathered Jews is that **he** is to be the lamb that is sacrificed for their spiritual salvation. The great invitation to drink Jesus blood and eat Jesus flesh would

have been a concept the Jews would have been repelled by; for drinking blood was considered unclean – not kosher. Jesus sounds as though he is recommending breaking the laws of the Jewish bible and is blaspheming in his own way to try to get the concept across to contemporaries in his society. He wants their attention just as he wants ours today.

And the message is as radically simple today as it was then – hard to believe and the basis for our faith. Jesus loves us unconditionally and wants us to be in relationship with him. Jesus loves us unconditionally and wants us to be in relationship with him.

But we must make the move to be in relation with him.

Imagine that you are invited to a friend's house for Sunday dinner. He passes you a plate of hot buttermilk biscuits and asks, "Have a biscuit?" You say "Yes, thank you, I would love one." But, instead of reaching out and taking it, you simply sit there and smile. Your friend, holding the basket in front of you says, "I thought you wanted a biscuit!" You respond, "Oh I do!" and continue to sit there with your hands in your lap. If your friend were Jesus his response would be, "Well, if you want it, you are going to have to reach out and take it for yourself. I am not going to put it on your plate for you!"

We must ask Jesus to be our sustenance. And we can invite him to be our living bread any time we want or need him.

How many times do we depend on – even pride ourselves – on our own ingenuity, our independence, our self-reliance? We don't want to be a burden; we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. You know all the language you use. But Jesus' invitation is for us to ask God for God's help first and then follow what we discern as God's will, and using our immeasurable gifts and talents and reason to live a joy-filled, loving life.

The John writer uses the 'eat my flesh and drink my blood' language about 6 times in today's passage. It's big and bold and in your face repetitive because you and I have big, deep hungers at times in our lives. "Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy, and Pride -- these are a few of my favorite things – how about you? What are the behaviors we use to fill our holy hunger? How can we let go of the need to feel superior to others? How do we once and for all time stop procrastinating? How do we engage in tenderhearted love for our sisters and brothers with whom we deeply disagree? Let go of righteous indignation and self-destructive anger? And on and on.....

We fully engage with Christ at the most mortal level – we eat his flesh and drink his blood. We replace our selves with Him. We fill up on him rather than with us. The strength and the renewal we receive from God's body and blood binds us with the Christ into one people that together we may move out in to the world serving our neighbors, those whom we know and those whom only God knows.

Isn't this the Eucharistic prayer that the presider asks on our behalf? "Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only,

and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name.”

We come to the table to be fed with the grace of Jesus Christ that passes our understanding but which we know fills us with the desire to see others, to accept others, and to serve others. We are renewed with the body and blood of Christ so we can go out into a wild world and maintain the peace of Christ instead of being swept up in the need and greed of the world that triggers our insecurities and self-centeredness.

This Sunday we are given big language that is hard to miss—we are given a neon sign of an invitation in case we have been sleeping through the previous weeks of “feed my sheep” lessons. Jesus already knows what our hungers are and is offering his human and sacred self as holy food and drink to nourish us in healthy and healing ways that will satisfy our self-centered needs and move us out of ourselves to serve others.

The more we invite God to be our holy food and drink the more renewed strength we will gather to worthily serve the world in Jesus’ name. And we will do it together with gladness and singleness of heart because we have feasted on the finest banquet there is. Amen.