

John 6:51-58

We are very familiar with the metaphor of eating and drinking; we "devour" books, "drink in" a lecture, "swallow" a story ; we "chew over" something we've been told, we "stomach" something said, or say "I can't stomach that idea!" and sometimes we have to eat our own words! I have heard grandmothers declare they could "eat up" their grandchildren; whereas to bite someone's head off conveys a different notion! And I'm sure you can think of more.

As we've been seeing in our gospel readings over the past month our Lord also uses this kind of picture language and it's very powerful.

And we've remembered that even though we now use some of this picture language in our Communion services Jesus is not primarily talking about those.

No, he's talking about something far more fundamental. Just like eating food is essential for life, so is Jesus. Just like food satisfies our hunger so does Jesus. Of course we get the point. He's obviously not saying that sharing in Communion is essential and you can't have real life as God meant it to be without Communion. That would mean, for instance that toddlers and young children could not know Jesus – whereas it's plain they can. No, we are to see what we do and know what we hear at Communion as pointing to the great central truth of the gospel message. It's in Jesus, and only by trusting Jesus that we have the kind of life we were created to enjoy. Life as God meant it to be. Life knowing him, our creator and master as our wonderful loving heavenly Father.

That's what Jesus says in John 6:51:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever;

Or verse 54: Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day;

Or remember verse 57: Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

Or verse 58: This is the bread 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."

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Notice 3 crucial points from this passage:

1. Jesus tells us we need this food – and he alone gives it.

The language is important. It points out that we humans are in desperate need of satisfaction – and everything else but Jesus will just be smoke and mirrors. Retail therapy, gourmet fish and chips, just bought the best ute in town, successful at child-rearing, being mentioned on TV or in the paper, a successful courtship ending in a massive YES; I will marry you – all these things and everything else will not satisfy in the long term.

That is, anything apart from Jesus.

One writer has said: Is he as real to you spiritually as something you can taste or handle? Is he as much a part of you as that which you eat? Do not think me blasphemous when I say that he must be as real and as useful to you as a hamburger and french fries. I say this because, although he is obviously far more real and useful than these, the unfortunate thing is that for many people he is much less.

Jesus' guarantee – sealed with his own blood – is life, eternal life, life tasted now and experienced in eternity in the closest relationship possible with God. Verse 57 again:

Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

Have you “eaten” Jesus? Have you realized that he is the one with the right to call the shots for every man, woman and child, and that he died for you to bring you to God?

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2. Jesus tells us this food is his death and resurrection

Jesus is very clear about this. It is his death for our sins that we must realize is the only way to God. The only way to know God. The only way to live, really, because this is the reality. Sometimes people are offended by Christians talking about sin and the need for forgiveness. Offended by Christians talking about Jesus paying the price in his death of the way we try and push God to the margins. Of Christians saying that apart from Jesus we are all without God and without hope in the world.

I want to say - you may have objections, but the truth of the matter is that in Jesus God has dealt with all of those things. There is mercy full and free because Jesus died. There is certainty that we belong to God because Jesus sealed it with his death. "The wages of sin is death – but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (to quote the apostle Paul) or as Jesus has already said in chapter 3 of John's gospel: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

3. Jesus says: believing is eating

We've already seen earlier in John 6 that our Lord lifts our attention to this great fact: You work for food that spoils. You work to provide for your family – and that's the way the world is wired. But that product of your work always needs to be replaced. The tummies satisfied tonight will be wanting their muesli in the morning. I am not talking of food like that. I am talking about food which brings eternal life, not just a few more hours to the next meal. And he goes on to say that this food is himself and that the way to eat this food is to believe him. To trust him, to put our confidence in him.

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That's what is assumed by our prayer book writers when they put in our mouths this picture language of eating and drinking at the Communion. It's all meant to drive us back to the basic reality that trusting Jesus and his death for us brings life with God as our heavenly Father and keeps us in that new life.

So can I both warn you and make a request?

The warning is that the effectiveness of sharing communion together is not in saying the right words well or performing the ritual perfectly. That has nothing to do with real heart trust in Jesus.

The request is - no it's stronger than a request – it's an urging, a longing.

Will you put your trust in Jesus?

Will you renew your trust in Jesus?

Will you see him as your Lord, your Saviour, your life your all?