

# "The Bread of Life, Part 3

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

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## **Ephesians 5:15-20**

*Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the 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.*

## **John 6:51-58**

*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'*

*The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' So Jesus said to them, '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 that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.'*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations, and our faith to you and to the power of your holy spirit. I pray that you would take the words that each of us carry within, the words we've offered in song and in prayer., the words that we've heard proclaimed from scripture, and the words that you've laid on my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless, and transform all of these into the living word. Your word. The word of Jesus Christ. And let that word do its work in our hearts and in our minds and in our souls. Let that word be at work among us. And most importantly, let that word be at work through us, so that all we do and all we say will make this world a better place as we love our neighbors and as we pray for our enemies. We ask this in Christ's faithful name, Amen.

First of all, I want to say welcome home to the 11 o'clock service. I thought that when we would go back to three services it might feel a little daunting having to get up a earlier and do everything three times, but actually, it's felt good to be home. It has a nice rhythm to it. And it's good to be back in this space with you at 11:00, although for many of you, it's just an hour later, so, God bless you. For some of us, it's been a long day already. And there was an earlier service called the Arise service, it's at 9:05 in case you're wondering. And there were some children sitting in the service and as the scripture was being read about, eat my flesh and drink my blood, I was sitting near someone who actually said, "Eww, mom. That's gross." And I thought to myself, "Darn, I hope no one heard her because that was my whole sermon."

Eat my flesh and drink my blood, like, are you kidding me? That's disgusting. And so I found myself this week identifying with the Jews who were disputing among themselves, basically asking like, "What on Earth is this guy saying to us? Eat his flesh and drink his blood like, whoa. That's blech." But that's what Jesus says. It's right here in scripture. And there are people, who, when they read this text, think that that's

exactly what Jesus is saying. You need to eat his flesh and drink his blood. In fact, some of our neighbors, and our friends, and our family, and maybe even some of us, have gone to churches where they believe that when they have the Lord's supper or Communion or Eucharist as they call it-- Roman Catholics --that the bread, when the priest says the magic words, and the cup, when the priest says the magic words becomes the actual flesh and blood of Jesus. And so precious is this bread now transformed and cup transformed, that when everyone has had their fill of it during the coming up for Communion-- don't put your hand out and touch it.

When they're done, the priest will take it back to a cabinet that's usually in the front of the sanctuary, up in the Chancel. It's often gold colored. Sometimes it's rounded or flat. There's a door and there's a lock. And he has a key. And he takes the key and opens the door and puts the unused elements in the cabinet-- called the Tabernacle --and shuts the door and locks it so that no one can mess with Jesus. Or maybe because they're afraid Jesus will get out. I don't know. It's been a while since I've been Roman Catholic, but I've watched them do it. And I know it's called the Tabernacle because I've sat in a service and wondered, "What on Earth is he doing? What's that thing called and why is he locking it away?" Because they believe that when Jesus says you eat my flesh and drink my blood you better do it because otherwise, you will not have life within you.

Now I asked at the early service-- and I know it's not appropriate for this much more refined service --for a show of hands of anyone who believes that it's actual flesh and actual blood. Thankfully, I was the only one who raised my hand as I demonstrated what I expected to see. Everyone else kept their hands down, and I said, "Thank God we're all Presbyterians." Because Jesus I do not believe is telling us that we're going to eat his actual flesh or drink his actual blood. But something happens to us when we come to church-- and especially when we celebrate Communion --that, to me, raises this issue to a level that's maybe even more important than what he's literally saying. Because so often we come and celebrate Communion as if it's something that's all about death. I mean, after all, Karen and I stand before you with bread and cup and say, "This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat. This cup is the sign of the new covenant. My blood shed for you for the forgiveness of your sin. Take and drink." And yes, Jesus died for us to forgive our sins. To pay the price that the Old Testament demanded. A sacrifice. The ultimate sacrifice. Gods own son so that we might have our sins forgiven.

But I think there's something more important at work in this passage-- and really throughout the thread of scripture --for us to wrap our heads around-- or our hearts around. It isn't so much that Jesus is saying, "I'm gonna die and you're gonna eat my flesh and drink my blood." What we need to remember is at the beginning of this passage and at the end, Jesus says, "I am the living bread. And whoever eats this bread will live forever or have eternal life." And so we have a choice. Are we going to understand what Christ is doing as a way for us to be fully alive or somehow that we're responsible for Christ's death? Are we going to choose life or choose death? Because they're both in this passage. And they're both really throughout all of scripture. Can you guess which one I'm going to choose and share with you? I'm going to choose the living bread and eternal life. I'm going to choose to have the eyes of faith and the ears of faith to understand that Jesus is not talking literally about flesh and blood, but figuratively or substantively and that we need to see beyond the words to the essence or the intention of what Christ is doing. And the reason I think we need to have these eyes and these ears, besides the fact that it says so in scripture, is because everyday life demands it from each of us.

I know that many of you know that I've spent-- not too long ago --six weeks in a neck brace. And there were days when I questioned what God was doing. There were days when I tried to figure out why God was punishing me and that I had to have yet another surgery. And when the surgery was over, I still didn't feel great. I could have chosen the death route and tried to continue to figure out, "Okay Lord. What's going on? Why did I do-- What did I do? I'm so sorry." But instead, I feel like it's important to see beyond the literal and understand there's something more going on than just what we see. And going back to three

services in a very real, concrete way to kind of help us understand what God is up to. Because rather than sitting at home with a neck brace, we get to do three services this Sunday. We get to be the church fully alive again with early service, and the 9:05 service, and this service. There's more going on.

Life or death? Living bread or flesh that we need to eat? And I know I'm not the only one sitting here-- standing here. Sorry, I'm standing, you're sitting. I get it. I know I'm not the only one that has to make the decision between life and death because some of you have lost a spouse. I never have. I know that some of you have faced cancer diagnoses. And I never have. I know some of you have lost a job or feel underemployed. I know some of you struggle with different issues that some of them are known, and some of them are private. But I know that every day each of us have to stand in that place and make a decision, "Am I going to let the death parts of life dictate how I live or am I going to be fully alive by faith? And am I going to face whatever challenges come my way with optimism, and goodness, and peace, and mercy, and love?"

So I want to offer you three concrete-- not concrete-- three solid ideas that you can meditate on when you find yourself sort of in that stuck place and you're trying to figure out, "Which way do I go? Am I okay? Should I do this? Shouldn't I?" When you find yourself sort of between the pressure of life and death and you're feeling a little bit more like the death side is winning, think about these things. First of all, think about the fact that Jesus says, "I am the living bread." Chew on that. And think about in the first stories of the creation of humankind in Genesis that God scoops down a hand and grabs some dirt and breathes into it, "huff", the breath of life. In chapter two, when God goes, "huff," humankind is formed in God's image. That's you and me. Dirt and spirit, mingling together all the time. And so again, a choice. Are you going to focus on the dirt or the life, the spirit, the huff, of God? In the prologue to John's Gospel, it says, "The Word became flesh and lived among us. And we have seen God's glory. The glory is of an only son. And from that, we have received grace and truth." Again, this word of God, this huff, is alive among us in the person of Jesus and in the person of you and me.

And finally, I want you to remember and think about what I believe is one of the most beautiful passages in all of scripture. It's short. It's sweet. And it is to the point. Jesus Christ in John 10 says, "I came that you may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd." Again, the invitation, for us, is to have life and have it abundantly. To embrace the fact that the spirit of God resides within us and that we are alive because of that. What's going to stop us if the spirit of God resides within us? The only thing that's going to stop us is if we don't have the faith to trust that that the spirit is there. "I am the living bread that came down from Heaven and the one who eats this bread will be alive forever." Amen.