**The Eucharistic Meal**

John 6:51-58

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| Slide | **Sermon** |
| 1 | Title slide |
| 2 | **Introduction:** It was awful. It was gruesome. The female lions of a pride finally caught the Wildebeest on the African plain. One attacked it flashing its white incisors and biting into the throat while others grabbed a leg or jumped on its back. The National Geographic program, unlike the Disney version, showed the graphic detail of the lions eating the raw meat of their kill and sharing it with their cubs. I shudder and get queasy in my stomach remembering this scene in my mind. |
| 3 | And, to tell the truth, I have some of those same feelings when I read this text in John 6:51-66.  In this text, Jesus says that while alive he is the “living bread” and that even in death, his flesh and blood is “true Food” and “true drink.” Those who eat it and those who drink it “abide” in him and he in them. Jesus is sending a strong message that whoever wants to “live forever” can do so. But the food of such immortals is flesh and blood – his flesh and blood.  What’s going on here?  Look at context. At the beginning of Chapter 6 we have the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus takes 5 loaves and 2 fish and fed the whole bunch. They were so taken by it all that they wanted to make Jesus their King right there and then. Jesus used the symbol of bread as a symbol for himself. As bread is the staple of life, he showed how he could give them that staple and meet their hunger needs. Then Jesus went on to say he came down from heaven to be the “bread” for their spiritual life as well.  Now, this upset some of the Jews, those Jewish leaders against Jesus, especially when Jesus got to this portion of his teaching. How can Jesus say that we have to eat his body and drink his blood? Is he a cannibal? But the Jews were not the only ones having trouble with this. It’s helpful to notice that people who heard Jesus say these things were equally turned off. In verse 60 it says, “On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘this is a hard saying. Who can accept it?’” In verse 66: “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” Many of the folks that wanted to make him King just a day or two before decided that they didn’t want any part of him!  I must admit if we take this text on the literal level, we can’t accept it either. And, Jesus isn’t too helpful. He simply repeats what he’d said and amplifies it. |
| 4 | Read a comment about two couples who went to see the movie a couple of years ago called the Gospel of John, a 3-½ hour movie portrayal of John’s gospel word for word. One couple, a pastor and her husband, thought it quite inspiring. The other couple who had no church affiliation, looked at each other in the middle of the movie and one said to the other, “when will this Jesus ever stop talking?”  Jesus’ teaching dominates this Gospel. And this is particularly true in Chapter 6. The Jews and the disciples alike have real difficulty with this teaching. We do too. Yet, Jesus keeps repeating it. Over and over he says I am the bread of life. To have eternal life you must eat my flesh and drink my blood. But how do we do this? |
| 5 | How different groups share communion shows how folks have dealt with this.  Roman Catholics – transubstantiation the bread and wine actually change from bread to Christ’s body and the wine to Christ’s blood when the elements are consecrated. That is to say that mysteriously the bread and body of Christ coexist together and the wine and blood of Christ coexist together. Thus one who takes communion in this fashion is in a mystical way eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ.  Luther and most Protestants – Consubstantiation the body and the blood of Jesus coexist with the bread and wine after the consecration of the elements. That is to say bread is still bread and the juice is still juice but in faith we eat and drink them remembering Christ's physical sacrifice for our lives on the cross.The bread and juice become symbols of the body of Christ. For Jesus was speaking in spiritual terms when he spoke in the text fof today.  But the answer Jesus gives gets us over the human’s tendency to stay literal  Jesus gives us his flesh to eat by dying on a cross. Whereas a lamb slaughtered as a sacrifice might end up as food for the poor or the priests, and a criminal hanging on a cross may eventually become carrion for birds of prey, Jesus dies and in dying his body and blood become for us “spiritual” food that animates us, makes us whole, enables us to “live forever.” Jesus would later revisit this theme in the upper room (see Luke 22:19-20) and the sacrament/ordinance of the Eucharist/Last Supper/Thanksgiving meal would become the most enduring and profound rite of the Christian church.  Theological arguments aside (transubstantiation, consubstantiation, etc.), Jesus makes it clear that he’s not dying for nothing. His followers and those who would “live forever” must come to appreciate that his flesh and blood are their spiritual food. They must accept his body and blood are the sacrifice. |
| 6 | John 6:51-58  What I am about to say will not mean much for vegetarians, but I think if you are vegetarian you will understand the point. These days, not surprisingly, in many church settings and theological ivory towers, the language of blood and sacrifice is disdained. But think about this: It’s quite possible that when you leave worship, you’ll go home or to a restaurant and you’ll have a meat entrée and vegetables, etc. and a drink. Meat and wine were the staples of most Jewish meals in Jesus’ day: lamb and wine. When we eat meat, although we seldom think about it, a death and sacrifice have occurred. The meat we eat and the drink we drink will, for at least a day or so, sustain us, keep us alive, make us strong, and carry us forward to another day. Jesus argues that similarly, “eating” his flesh and “drinking” his blood, in the symbols of the Eucharist, point us, or help us to remember his sacrifice and thus to sustain us, not for another day but “forever.” |
| 7 | Folks, Jesus spoke these words repetitively in these 60 plus verses to drive home the point:   * Physical food and drink are very important and he knows that. * But our eternal life and our spiritual life is what needs attention more than anything else. For without being reconnected with our Creator, this human life is short and has little meaning. But in Jesus, we find life now and forever. Not existence, not just a fully belly, not just physical pleasure, but real everlasting life that gives unsearchable satisfaction!   In verse 63 Jesus says, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” |
| 8 | Conclusion: Folks, Jesus is concerned about our everyday lives; about each person having the basic needs of food, shelter, water, good friends, and good relationships with your spouse and family and having meaningful work. But more importantly Jesus is concerned that we have a right relationship with him. Jesus wants us to have real Life and eternal life! And Jesus wants this so much for us that his body and blood became our “spiritual bread and wine” so that our spiritual and eternal lives would not be left unattended in the consuming day to day life we lead.  Are you attending to your spiritual life? Are you attending to your eternal life? Jesus provides the means to attend to both of these. The Eucharistic meal, or Holy Communion, or the Lord’s Supper is the Church’s way to call us to let Jesus lead us there. so today we celebrate Communion. As you eat the bread or wafer, thing of Jesus dying on the cross for your sins. As you drink or juice or wine thing of how Jesus' blood was shed for you! Amen |