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*John 6:24-35*

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

*[Jesus said,] "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; 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 forever."*

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Another segment of this bread of life series from John. We heard for years and even in the last few weeks of Christ as the bread of life from heaven. We might have heard of bread the most common food in numerous cultures, many different variations but bread – these days, gluten free, dairy free, accommodations for the many allergies. But still Bread! And here we are again once more gathered to hear, to be fed and nourished with the bread of Christ. It is a beautiful blessing to join you once again this year through the ELCIC summer sermon series, giving the Pastors, diaconal ministers and all worship leaders a small reprieve.

I am Rev. Prema Samuel, serving as the Assistant to the Bishop for congregational Life of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories. As I record this sermon, I am greeting you from the beautiful and traditional territories of the Lkwungen (lek-wen-gen), Malahat,

Pacheedaht (pah-chee-da) Scia'new (Chee-a-new), T'Sou-ke (so-ok) and WSÁNEĆ (Wh-say-nich) peoples. As I am blessed with the many experiences here during my stay here, I invite you to look around at the land in which you join us from. Gathering in the blessedness of this land, I invite you to take a moment to acknowledge our traditional hosts and honour their welcome and graciousness to us as we work, pray and play on this land.

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

Here is God, taking on human flesh in order to have a personal relationship with each of us. This is a Saviour who taught us how to live, what it means to be human, what it means to serve the world around us and what it means to follow God.

Baking sourdough bread requires wild yeast. You can't just go to a store and buy it; you have to “catch” it. You put a cup of flour and water on the counter and let it catch dust and other particles. Before you know it, it's alive. It breathes and eats. You have to nurture it and continue to feed it until it grows. This becomes the “starter” for the bread. The living Father is the bread starter. Breathing and growing, this starter abides in the Savior, the bread from heaven. In the Nicene Creed, we profess that Jesus is “begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father” (*ELW*, p. 104). Jesus, the bread of life, is the same substance as the living Father, wild and wonderful, creating and sustaining life.

This is a Saviour who took on the great weight of our killing sin and made sure that this weight was no longer ours to bear. On the cross, our lives were given back to us, now and always. And in the resurrection, we were bound to Christ forever, for as Paul says: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

This is our Saviour, who loves us beyond our comprehension. This is our Saviour who, in our reading for today, tells us that he is our very life and that in eating and drinking of his flesh and blood we are connected to Christ forever and we are made to know God's life because of it. We celebrate this truth and promise every time we participate in the Eucharist. Christ with us, as close to us as the bread we eat and the wine we drink.

What is this Jesus thinking and saying? Eat flesh and drink blood, the thought is grotesque. To add it to, in this installment of the “bread of life” discourse in John 6, in the Greek beginning with verse 54, Jesus speaks not of “partaking” in the bread of life,

but of “munching” or “chewing.” It’s a slow process of rumination. Cows are an example of animals that eat this way. They are called ruminants and have a four-chambered stomach.

Life – this precious given life with no strings attached. What is this life that we want it so much? Even after being affirmed that this life is a gift given, want to ensure there are indeed no strings attached, just in case there is some fine print we are failing to see.

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

Now, here is that fine print. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. Our own journey of processing the bread of life is a long one of abiding and ruminating in our faith.

Watch out people, here comes the kicker!

To eat this God’s flesh and drink his blood is to abide in this Christ. This is dangerous business. To eat and drink , so we can have life eternal is one thing, but to abide in this Christ and he in us??? Do we dare realize and acknowledge the full extent of what this means – to be Those who eat his flesh and drink his blood abide in him, and he in us.

Here is the danger – to abide in this Christ having consumed him. To have this Christ in us. This Jesus who walked the dirty roads, to see, to pay attention to and speak with the blind, lame, persons with questionable character, often questioning the ‘norm’, challenging the status-quo. To risk the life of being questioned, mocked, even ostracized.

We are regularly fed freely with this proclamation of life through sermons and the Eucharist to live a life of imperfect but unintentional journeying with Christ in us, attempting, in our broken ways, to embody the Christ in us.

Do we seek to serve others and this hurting world, making this a priority in our lives? Do we give of ourselves as Christ did?

We catch the Christ all around us and a fed by the Spirit and we rise. That’s a given!

Our Old testament reading calls us to Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”

Lay aside the immaturity of complacency – our good old ways, the golden days of large numbers of people in the churches. Of meeting the needs of people who looked, acted

like us. We continue to rise in Christ's spirit, given the courage and wisdom to be Christ's hands, feet and heart in this ever-changing world. Our world, our community no longer looks like it did in the good old days. And we are still fed and nourished to feed the current community, which is very different.

Here is this Christ who cannot be still and quiet and be happy with what is going well and according to the standard humans have set. Standards that discriminate anyone who is the other. Standards that want to make the other like us – to fit the 'status quo'. Here is the Christ who cannot tolerate anyone being made the 'other'.

This is the Christ we consume and crucify because he is dangerous. Dangerous because his Spirit stands for the healing and wholeness and oneness of all of God's creation. We crucify him again because it scares, or disgusts, or asks us to sacrifice too much.

I wish I could stand here and speak better news. But I can't. We fear Christ's passionate and dangerous love imparting his very self to us. We fall short. And the world suffers.

I am sorry I can't give better news. But honestly, there is no greater news than this. For despite our failings and weaknesses, despite how we may never be better than what we are, with our fleeting moments of discipleship followed by long moments of living in fear, our Saviour still continues to forgive us, heal us, nourish us and fill us with the same bread from heaven.

It doesn't make any sense. Generation after generation of humanity have fallen short. It would seem like we deserve the flood rather than the blessings of the cross, but Christ doesn't see it that way. He doesn't stop offering to us and all of God created wholeness and salvation. The blessings of the cross are not rescinded. The alleviation of sin never ceases. The resurrection promise is never taken away. We fail, but Christ never does.

We fall short, but Christ never does. We choose to remain in fear but Christ comes again to remind of the life. We choose to ignore the family, but Christ continues to call us to be God's family.

As we come to the table again, may we hear God's abiding urge in us. May we see the courageous love to courageously love.

In the night in which he was betrayed,  
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;  
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

This is Christ's love. This is Christ's abiding. We fall short. Christ picks us up. We fall short. And Christ offers us life again. We fall short. And Christ challenges us to follow him and inspires us to serve. The good news hurts when we know we fall short. The good news is life when we know it will never be taken from us. The good news is our inspiration to abide in Christ and he in us. The good news is life, as close to us as bread and wine, taken in all humility and awe as we approach the altar. The good news is Christ and Christ's sacred love for us all. And that is truly the greatest news we could possibly hear. May we embody this Christ in us.

Amen