

Sermon Proper 15B
August 15, 2021
CCM

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

A friend of mine called me the other day. And he began the conversation by asking, "How are you?" It is a common question, one we ask and are asked almost every day. And as we all know, there are standard responses, and of course, I gave them: "I'm fine. Doing well. Things are really busy right now, but I'm good." There was a chuckle at the other end of the line. And then my friend asked, "Are you trying to convince God, me, or yourself?"

Again, I suspect that I'm not the only one who has had such a conversation and such a revelation! Yes, we sometimes fill out the standard response a bit by adding something about our families, or our health, and where our travels have taken us, or what we have been up to. The point my friend was making is that we tend to build our responses on the circumstances of our lives, focusing on the externals, that we are outwardly fine, staying busy, getting our work done, meeting deadlines and fulfilling obligations, volunteering our time, and caring for our families. But, my friends, there is a difference, a vast difference, between "doing life" and "living life." And that is one of the main points of chapter 6 of John's Gospel. Jesus is calling us not just to "do life." He is calling us to "live life" by having the very life of God within us. For it is having the very life of God within us that will lead to eternal life.

Is there life within us? That is what Jesus is most concerned about this morning. The readings of the last several weeks have been building to that concern. Each week has brought us closer to that question. In this passage, Jesus is asking us the most important question from God's perspective: "Is there life within you?"

It is a hard question, one that frankly we mostly want to avoid or ignore. Indeed, before John chapter 6 concludes, many of those following Jesus will turn back and walk away rather than look deep within. You see, responses like "fine", "busy", "good" and "doing well" do not answer the question Jesus is asking and they do not provide the food that Jesus is seeking to share with us, the food that will fill us and sustain us through all that life will throw at us.

Again, remember that three weeks ago, 5000 hungry people showed up and their bellies were filled with just five loaves and two fish. Yes, it was a miracle, but in the end they did not understand the meaning of the moment. They thought it was about the loaves and fish and that Jesus could satisfy their physical hunger anytime he wanted to. But Jesus had something else in mind. He wanted them to seriously consider where true life really comes from.

Two weeks ago, Jesus challenged the crowd to think about the bread we are searching for. Is it perishable, lasting only for a moment? Or is it the bread that he is offering, bread that leads to everlasting life?

And then last week, in what must have been the most shocking point in this dialogue, Jesus makes it quite clear. The bread he is talking about is himself. He IS the bread of life, the living bread that has come down directly from heaven and entered into our world on that first Christmas day.

This morning, we are being told that, if we really seek to have God's life within us, we must consume Jesus! We must eat his flesh and drink his blood. No wonder those in the crowd got upset. And it is no wonder that, in later years, one of the chief claims against Christians during the time of persecution was that they were cannibals. This is jarring language, to say the least, not easy to hear and not easy to digest.

But Jesus is beyond persistent. If we truly want to have "life within us", to have the life that God always hopes and desires for us, then we must understand that his flesh is the true food and his blood the true drink that will sustain us always. Any other diet will leave us empty and hollow, hungry and ultimately bereft of life: "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." Frankly, those are ominous words, words meant to disturb us and challenge us to look deep within and wonder whether we really do have this life within us that clearly matters so much to this Jesus from Nazareth.

Of course, upon deeper reflection and consideration, we understand that Jesus is not saying to us, "break out the knives and forks." He is talking about so much more than just our physical and biological lives. He is talking about life in the spirit. He is talking about life that is beyond words, indescribable, and yet we know it is there for from time to time we really taste it. I know that you have had those moments, as have I. We get a taste of this life when we love and are loved so deeply that everything else seems tasteless and unimportant because we are more fully alive than we ever have been before. All is well in the world, not because we got our way but because we know that we are part of something far greater, and more beautiful, and more holy than anything we have done, asked for, or even imagined. In these moments, we are tasting this life that Jesus is talking about, and it is sweet, and it filling, and it is heavenly and we wish the moment would never end because spiritually it tastes so good.

Of course, the bottom line here is that, if we want to live life fully, if we want to have God's life within us, then we must let go and let Jesus live in us as we seek to live in him. That's what this talk about eating and drinking Jesus is all about. He must become the sacred nourishment that sustains us every day. Remember, we are what we eat. And the Good News is that we don't work for the life we long for and desire. Instead, we eat his flesh and we drink his blood so that his life becomes our life. For wherever human hunger and the body and blood of Christ meet, there is a meal that

ultimately leads to eternal life, a meal that empowers us to share the love, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion of God's Son with all we meet. It is not about the externals my friends. It's the life within that matters most to our God and to his Son who has sent into the world to feed and share with us everlasting life.

Amen.