

Feeding on Jesus

John 6:48-49

One evening Jasmine and I were at my parents' house for dinner,
and we were showing my parents some photos of a recent trip overseas.
And as my father turned the pages of the album he exclaimed
"You've taken a lot of photos of food!"
And that observation startled us a bit and so we said "what do you mean?"
And we picked up the album and he was right; so many photos of food!

You see when other people go on holidays they might look at the scenery,
others again might seek out fun activities to fill their day with,
Jasmine and I look for the nearest restaurant.
Our idea of a good hotel is not the view or the comfort of the bed
but the quality of the buffet breakfast! We love our food.

There is a great irony when it comes to the food that we love so much.
On one hand food is an absolute necessity for life,
go without it and you'll live a couple of months at the most.
However, pick the wrong sort of food and you'll shorten your life expectancy!
Depending on what you choose, food has the power of both life *and* death.

This is now our second last sermon in our extended series in John ch6,
a chapter focused on this metaphor that Jesus uses to describe himself
"I am the bread of life" he says.
And in these verses he makes a comparison between different types of bread:
The bread that ends in death and the bread that leads to eternal life.

Spiritually speaking we are all feeding on something.
The American writer David Foster Wallace once said that
"There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships." He said
Everybody is devoted to something,
we're all seeking meaning by some method.
For those who are perhaps a little more spiritually aware,
this activity has the goal of grasping hold of salvation,
the goal of dealing with our sins.
And one of the questions that's raised by today's passage is this:
Is our chosen spiritual meal the one that really leads to life?
And in answering this question,
Jesus paints a distinction between bread that works and bread that doesn't.

If you take a look at our passage, you'll notice that, at its beginning and end,
Jesus makes mention of the Jewish ancestors eating bread in the wilderness.
A few weeks ago Emily explained how this is a reference to an OT story.
The Israelites had been led by Moses out of the wilderness,

and in their desert wanderings God had looked after them
by providing a miraculous bread from the heavens
which they would find on the ground in the morning.

And for this group that Jesus is speaking with,
such an event was the absolute pinnacle of spiritual experience.
Back in v 31 they make reference to this past story as a kind of benchmark.
“We’ll believe you” they say to Jesus,
“if you can do something like what Moses did with the manna.
Do something that satisfies our present needs, like Moses did,
then we’ll pay attention”

But as he’s done before, Jesus reminds this group that their wants are too small
Verse 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the
bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living
bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is
my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

So the two breads that Jesus places in contrast here are, on one hand,
the type of bread which—even though its given to us by God—
fails to do anything long term,
and on the other the bread of Jesus’ sacrificial death.
Note in v 51 we have an even more accurate definition of the bread of life.
It’s not just a reference to Jesus,
but more specifically it’s a reference to *Christ’s death*.
It’s feeding on *Christ’s death* that will lead us into eternal life.

If you are the type of person who watches over your diet
then you may have heard of super-foods,
the types of nuts and berries and fermented yoghurts
that have an extraordinary amount of nutrients
and do an incredible amount of work for your body in very small volumes.
But even if you were to have a whole diet of superfoods
they wouldn’t even make a dint on the life that Jesus death can bring us.
What Jesus offers us here is a path—a diet if you will—
to a life that so many are longing for.

There was a very interesting question asked on Family Feud the other week,
you may have seen it.
If you’ve seen the TV show you’d know that they survey 100 people
and the contestants, playing in families, have to guess the top responses.
The survey’s task: “Name something you think about every day”
The second highest response: *death*. The highest: *food*.
Isn’t that interesting? The very two themes brought together by Jesus
in this chapter of John’s Gospel.
Jesus knew a thing or two about human nature,

and human nature doesn't change all that much!

But its also interesting that *death* was such a high ranking response!

Death is not something we talk a great deal about,
yet many people are thinking about it everyday,
and Jesus says he has a food which enables us to overcome it.
The bread he offers us is his death, which enables our death to be overcome.
It's his death which wipes away the sin that leaves us estranged with God,
It's his death which removes all obstacles that bar the way to eternal life.

Is this the bread that you seek to nourish yourself with?

Sometimes we can seek nourishment from good things, God-given things,
but Jesus is very specific about the type of bread we need.
I've heard some people say "You know, nature is my church!
I feel most spiritual when I'm in nature, on a bushwalk!"
Well, I understand where that comes from: nature is one of God's gifts
and on occasion it caused the Biblical writers to bring praise to God.
But *even if* the thing you're feeding from comes from God,
unless it's the cross, then its not going to lead you to eternal life.
Manna was a gift from God,
yet it wasn't a food that enabled the Israelites to live forever. But the cross is.

So if this is the food that Jesus has on offer, how do we eat it?

It's this type of practical question
that's asked by the people Jesus is speaking with,
although they don't seem to ask it in a sincere, inquisitive way.
V 52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves,
"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"
Indeed, how *are* we to feed on Jesus' crucified body?

Jesus responds by pressing the image even harder,

⁵³ 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.

Again, Jesus stresses that feeding on his crucified body
is the only way to live forever.

But this begs the very question that's being asked by those in v 52,
surely this doesn't mean we act like actual cannibals,
gathering around a dead mans body with a knife and fork, does it?

Verse 54 has a clue Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,
and I will raise them up at the last day.

Verse 54 forms a parallel with verse 40, if you cast your eyes back up the page.

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

When you read v54 side by side with v40

it appears that eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood

is a metaphor for believing in him, for trusting in him.
 And as we've seen even earlier in this series,
 the work required by God is what? To believe in the one he has sent. (v29)
 We feed on Jesus' death by placing our trust in what Jesus did on the cross.
 As St Augustine said many centuries ago, "believe, and you have eaten!"

It's the kind of metaphor that we use in our own language from time to time
 Sometimes we say that we've *devoured* a book,
 or that we've *swallowed* a lie.
 or that we've *tasted* freedom
 What do we mean when we use these phrases?
 What we mean is that we've placed our focus on that book,
 or that we've believed that lie.
 Or that we've experienced freedom,
 And Jesus is using the language in the same way here.
 He asks us to have our focus on him,
 to believe in what his death can do for us
 to experience the freedom that his death secured for us.

But just to be clear, it's no lie that Jesus is presenting before us.
 V55 my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.
 His crucified body is effective,
 it really can take our sins away and leave us forgiven people.

One of the neat things about this metaphor
 is that it helps us picture the unity that we have with Jesus;
 a unity that is established as our trust is placed in him.
 When you feed on something it enters into you;
 modern science can describe how its nutrients become part of us.
 "You are what you eat"
 And so it is when we feed on Christ, verse 56:
 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.
 Feeding on Christ's death—trusting in Christ's death—
 That's the starting point after which Jesus remains with us.
 His is not a food that your body will use up and have to replace,
 rather his death is something that has no shelf-life,
 nor does it's power to bring us eternal life ever diminish.

Friends it's a very simple meal to eat, a simple but very effective meal.
 Place your trust in what Jesus has done on the cross,
 and that is a meal that will bring you into eternal life.

And each and every month (or twice a month at 8:30 service)
 we remember this spiritual meal,
 with a symbolic physical meal as we share in Holy Communion.
 I have printed there in your sermon outlines

a section of a prayer that forms part of the Anglican communion service.
As I read it I'm sure you'll see just how much of it is taken from John 6.

*Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ,
and to drink his blood,
that we may evermore dwell in him.*

Not only is the language of eating and drinking from our passage
but also the idea of dwelling in Jesus for evermore.

It's a thoroughly Biblical prayer,
so long as we remember that the eating and drinking are metaphors.

This is one point at which we differ from our friends in the Roman Catholic church.

I remember when I was a student at university the Catholic society
were very active and would often post provocative posters when advertising
their events. I remember one poster that read

"When Jesus said eat my flesh and drink my body HE MEANT IT!"

And this is Catholic teaching: that during the mass,
the bread and wine become the physical body and blood of Jesus,
even though they retain the shape and texture of bread and wine.

And when you read John 6 you can start to see why people might conclude this.

Jesus states his metaphor in pretty strong terms.

If you don't eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you.

And so it's easy to think that Jesus is being literal.

However, In John's Gospel he also calls himself a vine in ch15.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

[And no-one in the history of the church has ever argued that Jesus is actually a vine.

That when we plant seedlings out the front of our church we're actually planting....]

I think when reading these verses we need to remember

that we are reading them in John's Gospel, which is full of metaphors:

I am the vine, I am the light, I am the god shepherd, I am the bread of life.

And so as we share in Holy Communion together,

we might not be feeding on Christ's actual body,

but we are partaking in a physical symbol that reminds us of the true bread:

Jesus' death, that's the true bread.

And we trust that, as with the more verbal expressions of the gospel,

the Holy Spirit is using this *physical experience* to encourage us.

It's just bread and wine,

but they do point to one who is no ordinary figure.

They point to Jesus

whose death is the difference between eternal life and death.

In a few moments we will share in this physical lesson,

and I hope that for each one of us it's a moment

when we can once more express our trust, not in a ritual, but in a real person:

The Lord Jesus Christ.

Will you allow me to lead us in prayer.