

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost: August 18, 2024

“Eating Scripture”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on this Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost. We have scriptures today that focus on how Wisdom has fed humankind, and we also have a lot said about eating the flesh of Jesus, or "living bread" so to speak. Please know that both readings are related.

We know that the food of God – our consciousness and thoughts - needs to be nurtured to live good lives with good choices and wisdom. Today in the Gospel we see how Jesus has become the word, message, and therefore sustenance to all who desire to live as he has modeled to us.

The scope of our view on these scriptures is often narrowed by the Eucharist connection. Communion is not just reminding us of our participation in Christ’s salvific work. Nor is it just pointing us to the future of eternity at the heavenly banquet table. Communion, when we eat and drink the means of grace, is also a present-day calling to digest the narrative of God’s story.

Eugene Peterson in his 2006 book on the spiritual reading of Scripture, entitled, *Eat This Book*, is drawing on the biblical and historical imagery of “tasting and seeing,” and of prophets like John who had tangible experiences that involved eating or witnessing others eating scrolls of Scripture. Yes! there is a history of people eating scrolls of delicately thin material that contained words they wanted to live by, which were of course made of all organic materials at that time. All to better consume what was written into their body and minds.

Peterson lays out that this is the sort of thing that Jesus means here. Though Peterson is talking about Scripture, many of us recognize that the way we modern Christians will eat and drink Christ—alongside the sacrament of Communion is— through the Scriptures. Our Communion prayers continue to relate how, from the beginning of time until the very present moment, God’s

message – that we are beloved children of God – is recited not only as praise, but also as food for our souls, along with the tangible items.

Peterson writes, “Eating a book means to take it all in, assimilating it into the tissues of our lives. Readers become what they read. If Holy Scripture is to be something other than mere gossip about God, it must be internalized. Most of us have opinions about God that we are not hesitant to voice. But just because a conversation (or sermon or lecture) has the word ‘God’ in it, does not qualify it as true. The angel does not instruct St. John to pass on information about God; he commands him to assimilate the word of God so that when he does speak, it will express itself artlessly in his syntax just as the food we eat, when we are healthy, is unconsciously assimilated into our nerves and muscles and put to work in speech and action.” (pp. 20-21)

So rich is the experience of Jesus that you will be hungry and fed throughout your lifetime through the word, and now of course also, through the sacrament of Communion. Catholic mystic and priest Richard Rohr explains, “For saints, mystics, and budding contemplatives, “words have become flesh,” they have had an experience that has gone beyond words.”

This lets us know that reading scripture, prayer or meditation should not just be a mental exercise. When studying the word right, when feasting on the word, we need to get ourselves out of the way, to quiet our minds a bit so we can be fed. With a transcendence like this we get a taste of the eternal, the Really Real. "God give us this day our daily bread" includes not just the physical requirement, but the message of God, which, when all is said and done, is love.

Jesus is the Living Word, should have just been simplified to Jesus is the Loving Message from God in the flesh. We see and experience what we are ready to see and experience, or even what we desire to see. If we start out with a negative expectation, then it is more than likely that the rest of road we will go down will be negative. However, if we look at each experience that God sends our way as through the eyes of nourishment, including the sour grapes, our daily bread will feed us into the now where we can truly appreciate all the abundance we have in this moment.

It is interesting how in the Lord's prayer the order goes from daily bread to forgiveness. This is a telltale sign that our bread includes bringing God's love into nourishing our relationships, as well as for feeding our tummy.

As we become more like Christ, we will live our lives more as Jesus would have us live if he were here with us. Today, by the power of the Spirit, the way we live as God's people is as Richard Rohr tells us, to "unconsciously assimilated into our nerves and muscles and put to work in speech and action the love and mercy we have experienced from God." Maybe the old saying you are what you eat has some truth to it if you are trying to become more like Jesus.

For those of us who struggle with these seemly cannibalistic words written in this scripture, please note we are talking about feeding on words of wisdom and consuming both physically and spiritually a communion of love and mercy. We are partaking in the glory that God has presented to us now and forever more and may you always be, just a little hungry. Amen