St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church

Proper 15

[1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp15_RCL.html#ot1)[Psalm 111](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp15_RCL.html#ps1)[Ephesians 5:15-20](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp15_RCL.html#nt1)[John 6:51-58](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp15_RCL.html#gsp1)

Eternal 100

If you really want to know the average life-expectancy rate in your part of the world, or your part of the country, or your city, or by your ethnicity, your economic circumstances, the illnesses you’ve had, the number of surgeries, how the changes and chances of living in the 21st century have affected your psyche, you can go online and find out. Before you do, don’t freak out too quickly if you feel your age is edging to closely to the outside expectation for living in this mortal world. Remember, the numbers are averages. We should all intend to surpass the numbers with Olympic proportions and look forward to living out many a year from now.

Yet, we cannot, nor will we, simply go on and on into eternity. And we should be glad of that. First of all, who wants to keep on dealing with technical difficulties, red tape, passwords, billing and insurance options for another bazillion years. And, second of all, housing costs would go through the roof. Enough already.

So, what does Jesus mean by our opportunity for eternal life if we eat the bread and drink the wine that reminds us of him? Do we just go on and on and on, with the same old same old? I’m pretty sure Jesus did not mean anything of the kind and, as always, he leaves us to interpret and understand.

It’s a bit of a tall order for us mere mortals, just as it was for the people in his own time. Even his disciples said just after this scripture, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?”[[1]](#footnote-1) The discourse we heard this morning was taking place in Nazareth, when Jesus was home among his own people, having returned as an adult rabbi and teacher. Miracles had already taken place, like the feeding of the five thousand, turning water into wine and more, and his fame was spreading. But, as we know, that fame was lost on most of the people in his hometown. They, like many of us, truth be known, were skeptical. And to be frank, Jesus didn’t make it easy for them or for us to understand. His words didn’t seem to make sense to the people listening to him any more than they seem to for us. Humanity wanted validation. Signs. Proof. Something tangible. Like the manna that came from heaven in the wilderness. Whereupon Jesus corrects their thinking saying something like, “Look. Be clear. The manna that came down was real bread. Like the bread you made in your ovens this morning. It was provided by Moses, thanks be to God. But the bread I’m talking about is very different from any kind of other bread you can think of. It is me.”

That explanation did not go over well with the locals from the one they knew well as Joseph, the carpenter’s son. What’s he talking about? Giving us his flesh to eat? He’s crazy and he needs to get out of town.

But let’s leave them all for the moment and consider Jesus’ words ourselves. If you’re like me, you enjoy eating good bread. The problem with good bread is, however, that you can’t eat just one slice. At some point, as with all food after it is consumed, you get hungry and need to eat more. And the food and drink equation is pretty simple and straightforward. If you stop eating food completely, you will die.

However, Jesus is not speaking in mortal terms. His is a divine perspective and understanding. If we give our lives to Christ, relying, trusting, having faith in the divine guidance of Christ, believing in his direction and in who and what he was, and is as the bread of life, and that he provides the strength, insight and psychic power we need to keep on, keeping on, then we only need to eat that kind of bread one time. We don’t need to eat it over and over again. The Samaritan woman at the well had no need to return to Jesus for more water, once she drank in the living water that was Jesus. The very life-blood of Jesus. The blood that sustains the divine in us…the Christ in us…the essence of Jesus Christ Himself.

We can think in the same divine way when we think of Christ’s bread…the bread that is Christ. Participating in the Eucharist is a reminder that we have already eaten that part of Jesus that he wants us to take in. We remember his death, we remember his resurrection and we believe he will be with us again, and again and again. In other words, to eat the bread of life, to eat Jesus as the bread of life, is to believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and savior. The One who saves us from all that wants to kill our hopes, our joys and our savoring of all God’s blessings in our lives.

Jesus gave himself to the world for the life of the world and it is probably the most important point Jesus wants us to understand, which is why he goes over and over it again. He is making a point about sacrifice. The sacrifice of body and blood that Jesus made for us and for the world. But the teaching doesn’t stop there. Jesus is also speaking of the sacrifice you and I can make for someone else. To give of oneself is the greatest gift one can give.

A little lamb would be known the people of that time as a common yet special sacrifice, to God. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is giving himself to you and to me and to whoever in the world wants to accept him, now and forever, once and for all. His is the greatest gift of all time. He gave it for our sakes, as an offering in payment for our ignorant sinfulness. He offered it to God as a single intercession on our behalf.

So we do not hear these words with literal meaning. We hear them as part metaphor, part divinely inspired interpretation and as an invitation to walk with faith in Jesus Christ. Even though, as we know, Jesus, the Word, became human in the same way as do we. He was born, grew through a normal childhood with all the childish ways, he grew into manhood, gathering all the same human experiences as do we, loving, grieving, crying and laughing, suffering, dying and rising again to appear as human, eating fish on the beach, just to prove it. So his flesh is as real as yours or mine, and yet given life through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this last that we too often forget and that Jesus never forgot.

So, while we incorporate a divinely spiritual meaning behind Jesus’ words, we do not lose touch with the human, mortal, flesh and blood part of him. Jesus acknowledges his humanity with his references to body and blood, but he is referring to these basic elements of life itself as from Godself. Without these, “you have no life in you.”[[2]](#footnote-2) And again, he refers to himself as he says, “I live because of the Father.”[[3]](#footnote-3) So we begin to understand his equation. When Jesus refers to himself as the eternal Son of the Father, whose life we share, then suddenly we realize that if we abide in Him as He abides in us, then we, too, have the same eternal life.

When we enter into Holy Eucharist, and consecrate the bread and wine, we call upon the Holy Spirit to bless and sanctify the elements so that we take in the divinity of Jesus, God’s flesh and blood, quickened by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what gives us life. This is the breath of life….the same breath that formed Adam out of the dust….the same breath that was breathed into us at our conception, raising us as one with the Risen Lord, the second Adam, and we, as mere mortals of our time, are animated by the Spirit and made new, again and again and again, into eternity.

It is through this understanding and this willing acceptance of the body and blood of Christ that we enter into an eternal transformation.

There is a beautiful alternative scripture that precedes today’s Gospel. We’ll hear it next year, but let me share a little of it with you now, since it is so relevant to our reflection today.

It is from Proverbs Wisdom Scripture.

### Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,
“You that are simple, turn in here!”
To those without sense she says,
“Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”

You that are simple. You that are merely mortal. You that seek. You who are mature enough to taste this bread and drink this wine. Turn in here! Throw off your immaturity, come in and live, come in and walk in the way of wisdom and insight.

We have been given the teachings and heard Wisdom’s encouraging welcome to enter into what Jesus wants of God’s mortal creatures. What we are to learn is the ability to recognize the slow changes that occur in us as our faith deepens and as we dare to enter into the divine thinking of Christ. No longer simply existing in a way of life that has no life….living from issue to issue, circumstance to circumstance, deadening the impact of the world’s expectations with short-lived entertainment and escape. Rather we are called to enter into an event one could call the Olympic 100 open. It is an event that has no finish line, and there are no winners or losers.

When we walk with Christ in The Way of Christ, we live for Christ more than we live for ourselves. We give of ourselves completely, as a living sacrifice and thanksgiving and praise. Hear the words of one Eucharistic Prayer on Page 369 of the BCP.

“And we offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to you,
O Lord of all; presenting to you, from your creation, this
bread and this wine.

We pray you, gracious God, to send your Holy Spirit upon
these gifts that they may be the Sacrament of the Body of
Christ and his Blood of the new Covenant. Unite us to your
Son in his sacrifice, that we may be acceptable through him,
being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In the fullness of time,
put all things in subjection under your Christ, and bring us to
that heavenly country where, with [                          and] all your
saints, we may enter the everlasting heritage of your sons and
daughters; through Jesus Christ our Lord, the firstborn of all
creation, the head of the Church, and the author of our
salvation.

By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy
Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and
forever. Amen.

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R. Culver+

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1. John 6:60 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John 6:53 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John 6:56 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)