

Christ Episcopal Church

2 Emerson Street

East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855

Sunday, August 26, 2018

Proper 16 (B)

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

DRAFT

“The Living Bread”

8 AM and 10 AM Sermons

by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

John 6:56-69

Jesus said, “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.”

He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” But Jesus, being aware that

his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” Because of this

many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Dear God, create in us clean hearts,
and sustain us by your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

The Rev. Martin Copenhaver,
President of Andover Newton
Theological School and an ordained
United Church of Christ minister, wrote
in August 26, 2012:

http://day1.org/4043-eating_jesus

“There are times when the sacrament of
Communion seems like a refined
expression of religious devotion. The
table may be set with starched linen and
a gold-plated chalice, as if for an
exclusive banquet. The pastor may
speak the words of institution in
mellifluous tones, adding a soothing

dignity to the proceedings. But, occasionally, the startling imagery of the sacrament comes slashing through all of our refinements. On one such occasion, when I repeated Jesus' familiar words, 'This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you,' a small girl suddenly said in a loud voice, 'Ew, yuk!' The congregation looked horrified, as if someone had splattered blood all over the altar--which, in effect, is something like what the little girl had done with her exclamation."

In Jesus time, the Jerusalem Temple regularly celebrated with actual blood from a sacrificial lamb or goat or heifer which was thrown over the attendees as a sign of their forgiveness by God for their sins. This very physical observance is likely in the mind of Christ who foresaw himself as being physically bled and sacrificed on a cross just outside the walls of Jerusalem, and Jesus said his sacrifice would replace the blood letting of the Jerusalem Temple for all time; his sacrifice would be remembered as the church celebrated Jesus' death and

resurrection in its daily and weekly Eucharists which continued the Last Supper practice instituted by Jesus of substituting wine for blood and bread for flesh.

Can you imagine the budget for handi-wipes for a congregation that still practiced sacrifices of animals and sprinkling of the animal blood as its means of absolution of sin?

The very physical words that Jesus spoke to his closest disciples were possibly not as outrageous an image to his hearers as they may seem today. Yet,

even the thought of Jesus being somehow sacrificed was likely far from the imagination of any disciple who heard him that day in that synagogue in Capernaum. But indeed Jesus would become the sacrificial “Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world” as we say or sing at each Eucharist service here as the “Agnus dei”, the “Lamb of God” after the priest breaks the Sacred Bread.

Rev. Copenhaver in his 2012 sermon continued, “Occasionally, I will hear someone say that children should not

receive communion until they fully understand what it means. When I hear that I always think, ‘At what age is that? Who can claim to fully understand all that the sacrament means?’ John Calvin, after a long dissertation on the sacrament, summarized his understanding of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper by saying, ‘I would rather experience it than understand it.’”

Of course, we Episcopalians always tend to listen to the parents’ expectations for their children and do not knowingly give Holy Communion to anyone’s

children unless we ask the parent first. Some expect a teaching on the sacraments at about age eight before their child receives Communion, called “Early Communion Classes”, and others expect their newborn to be able to receive as soon as they can swallow. The latter is the generally accepted pathway to Holy Communion in the Orthodox Christian churches, but the eight or nine-year-old policy is in keeping with most Roman Catholic churches. We Anglicans tend to waffle a bit between these two norms. Orthodox

home Holy Communion sets always have a spoon which is used to serve a consecrated wine-soaked piece of consecrated bread to the baby right after its baptism. However, rarely ever would Episcopalians go quite that far, though. Yet we are known regularly to serve the Sacred Mysteries to tiny tots as soon as they walk, and occasionally even to babes in arms at the request of a parent.

And remember, many parishes have a BBQ for their opening community service in the fall; and believe it or not, that was the common feature of every

Passover service; the animal sacrificed to rid the people of their sins was roasted, and the priests ate it for dinner. We of course are the sacred priests of God, ordained or not. So, we all partake of the BBQ.

A Lutheran pastor of African descent summarized our Christian faith by saying, “Faith is not brought about by our effort, but faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God. According to Romans 10:17-18, faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of God.

http://day1.org/501-faith_and_knowledge

As I mentioned last week, one of the apparently great controversies the community of John was experiencing was in whether Jesus was actually human or whether he was entirely spirit and could not leave footprints as he walked. The resolution would take nearly four centuries to resolve at least partially, and even at that, half of Christianity was not on board with the conclusions of the Chalcedon concord of 451 AD which is

in our Book of Common Prayer on Page 864. The Western churches agreed among their bishops that Jesus was both fully God and fully human but not confused between each other. But in John's time, the debate was apparently raging in full force. One extreme side said Jesus was only a nice guy that God raised up to be God's Son. The other extreme group said God sent his Son from heaven, and that Jesus was already fully divine when he took on flesh, at the Incarnation in the Virgin Mary, but that he was so divine he never left footprints.

Later on the first group would be called Arians or adoptionists, and the second group were called Docetists. However, the mainline, center of the road Christians of John's community wanted to underscore their contention that Jesus Christ from his very beginning was fully God, but that when he came to earth as a Spirit-initiated fertilized egg in Mary's womb, he was truly a fully human being. Today's gospel lesson emphasizes that Jesus spoke of himself in very graphic terms of flesh and blood. But Jesus also in these same verses says he will be

ascending to heaven where he was before, and that would only occur if Jesus were completely divine at the same time he was human. John's community eventually prevailed in the Chalcedon agreement of 451 AD. However, in my experience I find some Anglicans lean toward the Arians, and some Baptists lean toward the Docetists. Go figure. And none of us really understand what we mean when we say Christ was both fully human and fully divine. But we do emphasize that taking the Body of Christ means more than just receiving Holy

Communion once a week. Taking the Body of Christ means ‘taking on’ the Body of Christ, that we ourselves embody Jesus Christ in our world, that we make the now fully Divine Son of God to be real to others by what we do and say in love to one another, friend or foe. We who have taken in the Body and Blood of Christ at Holy Communion are spiritually transformed into his spiritual substance in our physical bodies and then have powers that are none less than divine, but powers that are not our possession, but powers that God has

divinely given to each of us, to preach the Gospel, to cast out demons, to the heal the sick, to feed the hungry, to love the unlovable, and to sooth the sin sick soul, as the old hymn “There is a Balm in Gilead” says. We by eating Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood become that loving balm of healing to others, and to ourselves. Alleluia.

Amen.

Description: Eating flesh and drinking blood was blatantly physical, but Jesus used these shocking images about himself to emphasize how important it is for those who follow Jesus to become vitally involved in the hard issues of life and death, human suffering, and human frailty, and to bring Christ's love into all situations of life.

Tags:

Life, death, Jesus, Christ, God,
Chalcedon, Roman, Orthodox, arians,
adoptionist, docetist, John, community,
love, flesh, blood, body, Eucharist,
children, communion, early, infants,
babes, Episcopalians, Anglicans, Book,
Common, Prayer, middle, divine,
physical, human, incarnation, Agnus,
dei, Holy

Addenda:

[Garrison Keillor's description of Lake Wobegon, "where all the women are strong, the men are good looking, and all the children are above average!"

<http://www.lectionaid.com/18-3/3Qm.html> (by subscription)

Although human life spans have been increasing in recent decades, we are nowhere near achieving eternal life apart from Jesus. Historians report that the world has seen three periods where longevity markedly increased, and the

21st century will likely bring a fourth such period of increased life spans. The first period of increase occurred between 2.5 million and 100,000 years ago. The second wave of increase in life expectancy took place during the Neolithic era, about 12,000 years ago when animal husbandry and farming were established. At that point, the average life expectancy may have been about 20 years. Starting in the 18th century, with the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, life expectancies rose again. In the United States, the average life

span rose from about 33 years in 1776 to 47 years in 1900. Today the average life expectancy is up to 77 years.

Particularly in the Gospel of John, Jesus employs a number of "aliases." For instance, in John, Jesus is called the Good Shepherd, the Vine, the Light of the world, the Resurrection and the Life, and of course, the Bread of life. People who are familiar with Jesus right away recognize to whom those alternate names refer. In show business, though, probably only those closest to these stars would be able to make a connection

between their birth names and their commonly used names today. For instance, Alan Alda was born Alphonso D'Abruzzo; Woody Allen was Allen Konigsberg; Jack Benny was Benjamin Kubelsky; Bono was Paul Hewson; George Burns was Nathan Birnbaum; Judy Garland was Frances Gumm; Whoopi Goldberg was Karyn Johnson; and Roy Rogers was Leonard Franklin Slye.

If we think that crowd had a hard time digesting what Jesus was trying to teach them, we need to realize how hard it is

for non-Americans to try and understand the English language. At times, English can be nearly as incomprehensible as what Jesus was saying. To drive home the point of how difficult the English language is, and to promote a reform in English spelling, the playwright George Bernard Shaw used this example to demonstrate how variable and unreasonable the English language can be. To illustrate, he used the imaginary word "ghoti." and claimed that the word should be pronounced "fish." He reached that conclusion by using the

"gh." sound in "rough, "the "o." sound in "women, "and the "ti." sound in "nation."

A few years ago, there was a story in the news about a camp in Florida, operated by the Boys & Girls Club. One day the camp was scheduled to have a talent show. But an 8-year-old girl was told that she couldn't perform, because her song was deemed to be inappropriate. Her song was "Kumbayah." The camp officials said that since "Kumbayah." includes the word "Lord." in the lyrics, they couldn't allow it. I don't think I've ever heard of

anyone being converted to Christianity because of hearing "Kumbayah." But apparently that camp figured that just like a little bit of poison is too much, a little bit of Jesus is likewise too much. Many people seem to be fearful of getting too close to Jesus, for fear of the ways that Jesus might try to change their lives.

How much loyalty do you have to a cause? In the case of Jesus, he discovered that some of his followers were not as loyal as he might have thought. Some colleges have come up

with a new way to promote school loyalty. Through a company called Collegiate Memorials, it is now possible to be buried in a college-themed casket. The company currently sells caskets tailored to about 45 schools across the United States. Purchasers say they like the caskets, which come in the school colors and are complete with the school's insignia embroidered inside the lid, because there is a growing trend to personalize funerals. Some people have a real dedication to their alma mater, and having a casket that expresses that

devotion seems to be of interest to a increasing number of people. The caskets, which range in cost from \$3,250 to \$4,900, are priced about \$350 higher than comparable non-collegiate caskets. The respective colleges also share in the venture, receiving a royalty of about 9% in addition to annual licensing fees. The University of Nebraska casket was the top seller in 2001, with 50 being sold. Other popular schools are Alabama, Kentucky, Auburn, Oklahoma, and North Carolina. During the current year,

the casket company hopes to expand its services to cover at least 200 colleges.

How do we know that the disciples misunderstood Jesus when he said, "I am the bread of life."? Because the disciples suddenly began to shower Jesus with compliments—they thought Jesus would like it if they "battered." him up.]

“Spiritual Warfare “put on the whole armor of God” [Ephesians 6]

“Admiral David Farragut was an accomplished leader for the Union during the Civil War. He is most noted for the Battle of Mobile Bay. In August

1864, Farragut began his assault on Mobile Bay, located on the in Alabama. The bay was defended by mines, forcing the approaching ships to sail close to Fort Morgan, a Confederate fortress which dominated the channel.

Farragut's first ship, the Tecumesh, hit a mine and was blown up. Then his second ship, the Brooklyn, faltered putting the rest of the line of ships in disarray. With this loss of the battle plan, Farragut's ships drifted closer and closer to the cannons of Fort Morgan.

“Farragut could not allow this destructive cannonade to destroy his fleet. So, he pushed his ship, the Hartford, pass the Brooklyn to reassemble his line of attack. When he was warned of the dangers of mines, Farragut, in a now famous quote, said, “Damn the torpedoes! Full steam ahead!”

As the Hartford continued to approach Mobile Bay, the sailors on board could hear the mines clatter against the hull of their ship, but none exploded. Shortly after that, the shore

forts surrendered, and Mobile Bay came under Union occupation.”

<https://www.store.sermonsuite.com/mediate-word/most-holy-place> (by subscription)

“Spiritual Warfare “put on the whole armor of God” [Ephesians 6]

Thomas Jefferson never got tired of telling the story of why the Declaration of Independence was ratified and signed by the attuning delegates so quickly.

The committee overseeing the document had their rooms near a stable. The delegates became much annoyed by the

swarming flies. Many of these flies got into their leggings. The delegates became wearisome of constantly waving and swatting at the flies. This created an attitude of such impatience that they became hurried to assure the Declaration was signed so they could leave.”]

[A priest was giving 1st Communion instruction to children

And he was trying to explain that the bread was the body of Christ

One boy raised his hand and said—“Is it his whole body?”

Knowing he was in trouble, the priest
tentatively nodded his head—

And the boy asked back—“You mean his
bottom too?”

That’s the scandal of the incarnation—
If the Word became flesh and dwells
among us

It means that to get Jesus we must
encounter the world—

All the world—Even the messy parts

Eat the flesh and drink the blood—

There is always part of us that wants a
privatized Jesus that is sanitized—

We want a Jesus made in our image of
what is holy

That nice man with the beard who is
always sweet

And spouts off universal truths while
sitting on a mountain top

But SOPHIA pushes us into the world

SOPHIA makes us deal with the

Incarnate Christ—the living Christ

You must eat my flesh and drink my
blood

That means we have to deal with mess—
and ponder it in our hearts—]

<http://www.sermonmall.com/TheMall/18/082618z.html>

St. Stephen's Episcopal ProCathedral

35 S. Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 17201

The Thirteenth Sunday after

Pentecost:

Proper 16 (B)

August 23, 2015

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“To Whom can we turn?”

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

John 6:56-69

Feed us, Dear Lord, with your eternal body. Amen.

A visitor to a remote island in the Pacific while dining with the natives asked them what effect the Bible had had on them. They replied, "The Bible is the reason we are dining with you.

Previously we would be dining on you."

In the days before they had become Christians, their tribe had been cannibals.

Jesus was plagued with disciples who did not really believe in him. They were

probably impressed with his many miracles, his wise teaching, and his loving manner. But when push came to shove, they really did not agree with his statement that he had come down from his heavenly Father.

For a number of years, I went several days at a church leadership conference each January in California at the once famous Crystal Cathedral. One year I sat next to a family who seem to sweep into the church at just the right time when the television cameras were panning around the congregation. The father had a gold

or diamond ring on just about every finger and was quite well dressed in frills and finery. But as soon as the service and television cameras began to focus on the preacher and no longer on the congregation, the whole family got up and left. It seemed to me that they had come just for the opportunity to be seen on international television. They liked Dr. Schuller's fame and notoriety, and especially his broad television coverage. People like to be seen in the presence of the successful and the influential! Even television evangelists have their unique

followings, for one reason or another. But at least some of the followers are probably as shallow in their faith as some of those who had been around Jesus. 'It is good to be seen with the successful,' some may reason, 'but not if it involves any sacrifice or any real change of life style.' In the parable of the seeds sown on the various kinds of soils, they would probably be those represented by the ones sown on the rocky ground. Those were the seeds that rapidly sprang up but that quickly withered because they had no roots.

It is important to know whom one can trust. If you have purchased anything and found it to be defective, perhaps you can identify with that situation of trust. We take it for granted that goods and services will be guaranteed for at least thirty or more days. But try to exchange something if you have misplaced your receipt, and you will have an eye-opening experience of suspicion and perhaps even denial. Whom can we trust?

There is so much half-truth telling nowadays--perhaps it has been so from

time immemorial. But in our day and age maybe you have heard some of the following fibs, or should we call them little white lies? "The check is in the mail." "I'll start my diet tomorrow."

"Leave your resume and we'll get back to you." "This hurts me more than you." "I just need a moment of your time." "You can tell me. I won't breathe a word."

"I'm a social drinker, and I can quit any time I want to." "The engine is supposed to make that noise." "I can get another forty miles when the gas gauge is on empty." "It's not the money. It's the

principle." You could probably add more, but it is too painful to continue!

In this time of political campaigning, the word "spin" becomes of highest importance. Things are represented in the best possible light, but the truth is constantly being shaded. And out of all the claims and counterclaims we are left to sort out the brave from the bravado.

James Moore in his 1995 book, "Dimensions for Living," Pages 69-70, tells the story about a high rise building fire that happened some years ago in Chicago. Flames and smoke blocked the

view of all the escape routes on the tenth floor, so people on that floor went out onto a balcony. But they were trapped there because the fire ladders and climbers could not get up that high. It appeared that they were doomed.

However, one man in the group decided to try to find an escape route. He went back into the smoke-filled hallway and found the door to the fire stairs. He crawled back to the balcony and announced his discovery. One person said later, "You can't imagine the feeling of relief and joy we felt when that man

came back for us and said, 'There is a way out. Follow me. I know the way.' But only some of those on the balcony followed his lead. The others refused to go with him. They didn't believe him or trust him and would not follow. They gave up and stayed on the balcony, and they all died. Life was there for them, but they refused to accept it, and they perished. It's very sad to have someone who can help us, but we turn our back on them out of a lack of trust. In Jesus' case, Jesus claimed to be the way to eternal life. And if he is indeed the Holy

One from God, if it is true that only he had the words of everlasting life, shouldn't we listen and obey him?

Whom will we trust? We can trust Jesus. He is the escape route from eternal damnation.

People leave their faith for various reasons. Perhaps a prayer wasn't answered to our satisfaction. Or the church programs didn't meet our needs. Or our toes were stepped on. Or a diocesan or denominational decision was made that we didn't like, and so on. But probably the main reason people leave a

church is really because they cannot believe Christ's claims any more than those could who turned away from Jesus long ago. His teachings are too tough, his demands too far reaching. They don't really believe Christ's words, because if they did, none of the reasons for leaving listed would be enough to make them turn away from the church which is Christ's body.

Being told that Jesus did miracles for others may make some resentful that God did not do that for them. Yet others stay with an active worshipping faith in

spite of a thousand questions because Jesus' words are the best they have ever heard. To walk away from Christ is to cut ourselves off from the community that empowers us to live and love as Christ lived and loved. Leaving our church community diminishes our ability to live and help others. We admire those who refuse to turn away despite heartache, anxiety, and grievous burdens.

There is a popular song that has the line, "Who can I turn to if you turn from me?"

Dr. Walter Percy, Christian writer and physician, lay dying as he spoke to an interviewer. He was asked, "Would you consider turning away from your faith at a time like this?" He asked, "What else is there?" The interviewer went on, "Well, there's humanism, materialism, agnosticism, Marxism, behaviorism, Buddhism; there's astrology and occultism and metaphysics." And Dr. Percy replied, "That's what I mean. What else is there?"

How far will we go to be with others and with Christ? Where do we 'draw the

line' on how far we're willing to go? The lines we draw and refuse to cross may be the starting lines for Christ in our life.

In the play, "The Merchant of Venice," (I, iii), Bassanio says, "If it pleases you, dine with us." Shylock answers, "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so on; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you...."

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, defined character as the decision a person makes when the choice is not obvious.

Thomas Merton in his 1966 Gethsemane lecture said, "In times of deep loss and hardship, staying with Jesus is not an easy choice. It's far easier to give in to despair, anger, and frustration. [But] to give in is to give up the best."

The writer Art Buchwald noted, "Whether these are the worst of times or the best of times, they are the only times we have."

Pastor Grant Gallup, a late great Episcopal agitator and priest, notes that our choices are what God we will follow,

whom we will serve, what we will swallow, and whom God will carry home.

Will the god we have chosen be able to carry us to an eternal abiding place?

Someone asked how many megachurches keep the cross away? And does "mega" result from minimizing the truth?

The early third century church writer, Tertullian, said, "Faith is to believe the absurd."

Do we find our beliefs are only what is logical and [quote] "reasonable"

[unquote]? Or is not faith what we have when logic and reason fail? Does our faith transcend the experience of physical law?

Pastor Donald Macleod (quoted by Patricia Lynn Miller in "Sermon Mall") notes that other religions are escapes from life, but Christianity sets us free to be who we are.

One agnostic said he would give his right hand to believe what Christians believe.

Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. He who eats this bread will live forever."

There is a dramatic depiction of hell near the end of Dante's "Inferno". The Roman god Saturn is seen with three mouths, all eating some infamous traitor-
-Brutus, Cassius, and Judas Iscariot. Contrast that with the image of eating the bread that came down from heaven.

A missionary noted a sign in a Brazilian market that said, "We are selling cheap crosses." "We are selling cheap crosses."

Indeed, we may hear others selling cheap crosses. These philosophies say we will always find success if we do thus and so. Some tell us to program our innate reactions so we avoid failure and always pursue success. And, of course, when we buy their educational tapes, they become richer and we become poorer!

But the cross is never an easy way to follow. The cross is not a surefire way to success and fame and fortune. The cross is just that, the way of suffering and trials. But how else can we follow

faithfully and without deviation? Our Lord and Savior has set before us the way of life and salvation. It is the only way to eternity. It is the only way to God's heart. For us to choose another way is to choose death, for all eternity. We are free to choose what we will. But for us and for our church family we will choose Jesus Christ as our Lord and salvation. By his wounds we are healed. By his death we are raised with him to eternal life.

Amen.