

10am Eucharist Sunday 18th August 2024

Prov 9:1-6, Eph 5:15-20, John 6:51-58: Engaging with and remembering Jesus' death on the cross brings eternal life lived in, for and with Jesus

For the first time in a long while, our principal 10am Eucharist service is not being livestreamed. It's August, and lots of people are on holiday, including every member of the wonderful but very small team, one of whom normally sits up in the gallery (not for much longer, our new system will enable them to be sitting downstairs with us), to check that the camera's always pointing at the right person and that the system is working. If you'd be willing to join the team, we'd love to hear from you.

So we are all gathered here in person this morning, and I have a question for you. How important is it that we come together in person? How significant is it that we use our bodies in doing all the physical things that we're doing this morning? That we should stand, and sit, and sing? That we lift up, or put our hands together, in prayer? That we put out our palms to receive the bread, and lift the cup to our lips to drink the wine?

People often talk of their religious faith in terms of spirituality, but is the Christian faith just as physical as it is spiritual?

Part 1 - Because of me - Eternal life comes to us by the grace of God, through Jesus' death on the cross, and not by our own actions

If you've been with us for the last few Sundays, you'll be aware that throughout Chapter 6 of John's Gospel Jesus is in a dialogue with the crowd who've witnessed Jesus taking 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish and feeding 5,000 men.

The crowd naturally want to know what they can do to access an unlimited supply of bread. But what Jesus is seeking to share with them is the good news that what he is offering them is himself as the living bread, that they have only to believe in him, and that they will then have eternal life.

The crowd has already made a connection between the feeding of 5,000 men and Moses' feeding of the Israelites in the desert with the manna that was always described as bread from heaven. Now Jesus says that he is "***the living bread that came down from heaven***".

And now Jesus starts talking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Jesus tells the crowd:

- ***Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever***
- ***Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life***
- ***Whoever eats me will live because of me*** and
- ***The one who eats this bread will live for ever.***

Is Jesus saying here that it is our Eucharist service, and our participation in it, that enables us to have eternal life?

Before we jump to that conclusion, we should remember that Jesus is speaking here to Jews and not to Christians.

And we should also remember that John wrote this gospel for non-believers, in the hope that when they heard and read of all the signs that Jesus did, they "***may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing [they might] have life in his name***".

In fact, if we look a bit more closely, Jesus makes it clear that it is not our participation in a Eucharist service that entitles us to eternal life.

It is through and because of Jesus' death on the cross, that everybody who puts their trust in Jesus can have eternal life.

All the emphasis here is not on us, but on Jesus, and on his flesh and on his blood. Jesus says "***whoever eats me will live because of me***". He says "***those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day***".

So it is only human nature – our self-centred, sinful, human nature – that leads us to assume that we should be the centre of attention. To make this all about us, when it is actually all about Jesus: about Jesus being **“the bread that I will give for the life of the world”**.

In the Eucharist we’ll be recalling that Jesus said **“do this in remembrance of me”**. It is by trusting in what Jesus did on the cross, giving up his life that we might be reconciled with God, that we can have eternal life.

Part 2 - For the life of the world - Only Jesus’ body – only his flesh and his blood – could redeem the life of the world

Jesus emphasises how he came to us in the flesh. Jesus tells the crowd **“the living Father [has] sent me, and I live because of the Father”**.

Without Jesus’ birth, and his death on the cross, and his resurrection, there is no Christian faith.

The Christian faith is inescapably incarnational, rooted in the person of Jesus.

Only Jesus could be **“the bread that came down from heaven.”**

Only Jesus could truthfully claim **“the living Father sent me.”**

Only Jesus could truthfully say that **“the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”**

Mark’s gospel records Jesus saying he came **“to give his life [as] a ransom for many”**.

Jesus’ death couldn’t have paid the price for our sin unless Jesus himself was completely free of sin.

Only Jesus, the Son of God, has been **“tested as we are [, yet] is without sin.”**

Only Jesus’ body – only his flesh and his blood – could redeem the life of the world

3 - Abiding in the body of Jesus, and Jesus abiding in us – we live out our faith in our lives

The Christian faith is also incarnational because it is not just an idea or an ideology but is lived through human beings. And human beings are incontrovertibly material beings.

When we take part in the Eucharist we are worshipping, praying and praising God with our lips and hands and all of our bodies. We live out our faith with our bodies as well as our hearts and minds.

And God's word also calls us to live out our faith in our day-to-day lives.

Our reading from Proverbs pictures Wisdom calling us to ***“lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight”***.

And Paul, in his letter to the church in Ephesus, urges people to ***“be careful then how [they] live, not as unwise people but as wise”***, mindful that they are ***“making the most of [their] time”***; ***“not [being] foolish, but [understanding] ... the will of the Lord”***.

Jesus said to the crowd ***“those who eat and drink [his flesh and his blood] abide in [him] and [he] in them”***.

If our faith is what we are and what we do, as well as what we believe, people should be able to see our faith in how we speak and act.

In what we prioritise, and in what we choose not to do.

In how we spend our time, and our money.

At the end of the Eucharist today we will thank God for feeding us with the body and blood of Jesus, and through Christ offer God our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.

As we go about our lives this week, let's be thinking and praying about what that means for us.

About what it means for us to be abiding in Jesus, and for Jesus to be abiding in us.