

“Real Food for the Hungry”  
The Reverend Michael L. Delk  
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15B) – 18 & 19 August 2018  
Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

God loves to feed people. After their Exodus from Egypt, Israel received manna and quail to eat as they wandered in the wilderness. During times of desperation, God gave prophets like Elijah and Elisha bread and empowered them to provide for widows and their children, saving them from abject poverty and starvation. Jesus fed thousands with five loaves and a few fish as a sign of his purpose, and when the wine ran out at the wedding in Cana, he transformed water into wine abundantly so that the celebration could go on. All of these merciful acts of feeding reveal God’s love.

But Jesus did more than sate physical hunger. He fed people spiritually, too. Jesus gave the bread of his flesh as true food and his blood for true drink. Hearing this, however, disturbed people, who asked, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” That’s an excellent question.

Even though we know that Jesus spoke figuratively, the idea of eating his flesh and drinking his blood still troubles us. Images of cannibalism and of human sacrifice rankle. To use a theological term, it’s icky. But once we move past the literal interpretation, we see the symbolism of what he said, and we can embrace the reality that in the divine meal of Communion, Jesus feeds us with the only food that can fill our emptiness.

Through this sacrament of bread and wine, we experience the real presence of Jesus in a powerful way. Sharing the flesh and blood, we ingest the true substance of Jesus, his very essence, which unites us with him and with each other. When we accept the life-giving substance of Jesus, the source of all life, we become more like him. As the saying goes, “You are what you eat.” We receive nourishment, the strength to create and endure and to grow in

wisdom and faith. In Jesus, we can “Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight,” which inspires us respond with “thanks to God the Father at all times.”

This humble gratitude motivates us to feed as we have been fed. The awareness that only God’s grace provides what we need most drives us to call people to the feast to share in our joy. Bolstered by the fruit of God’s mercy, we feel emboldened to serve as servant girls of Wisdom, issuing the invitation, “You that are simple, turn in here!”

But there are times when we keep it secret, not out of malice or selfishness, but from fear that we might give offense or that people will label us fools and scorn and mock us. Let’s be frank. The message about the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the maker and sustainer of all creation is radical, and for many of the uninitiated, ridiculous. The sacrifice on the cross is a scandal, the concept of eternity viewed by some as an illusion to coddle the weak. And to many, this raw language about flesh and blood is disgusting, repulsive. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Sometimes, we stay silent because we lose sight of how precious this sacred meal is. We take it for granted and forget the immense power it conveys, or we feel unworthy to act as witnesses to this most wonderful grace. Who am I, we ask, to deliver the good news about the great I am, this mysterious God who works in surprising ways?

Sometimes, we crave the enticing flavors of the world around us. Bread and wine, flesh and blood, can seem rather bland by comparison. We hanker for the taste of freedom unfettered from obedience to God, which in a word is pride. We yearn for the spice of judgment and vengeance. We marvel and worship before the altar of success and safety.

None of this can truly fill us. It’s junk food. It can’t make us whole. The more we eat, the more we want. There will never be enough. We become slaves, addicts. The fruit of the

world poisons us, undermines our health, and makes our souls emaciated and feeble. We need to reject this rotten fare, choose differently, but as anyone on a diet knows only too well, easier said than done. However, we also know that it's easier to break away from habits that threaten to consume us when we have a buddy trying to do the same thing.

That's one of the chief reasons why gather here, to support one another as we take this risk, as we lay down our lives as an offering to God. There's no guarantee, no certainty in the life of faith, only trust in a promise. That promise deserves our trust because it was given by the most honest person who ever lived, an unwavering truth-teller unable to lie. That promise deserves our trust because nothing else does, nothing else gives us real hope, nothing else can fill us and keep us full.

And that's what we want, isn't it? To be fulfilled. To praise God with reckless, joyous abandon. To feel the energy of transformation, that's what we want and need most, isn't it?

So let's pay closer attention when we receive the bread and wine, aware that we're welcoming the very essence of God into our bodies, minds, and souls. Let's cherish this gift from the God who loves to feed people, and then move out into the world, sharing and not caring what people might think of us. Let's go forward boldly, confident that God makes us worthy, capable of acting as agents of change.

This sacred meal of bread and wine, flesh and blood, opens a portal to another world: a world of mercy, love, forgiveness, reconciliation. Let's unleash this power to wreak havoc on the false promises, on the junk food that sickens people. Lives depend on it. People are going hungry. They're starving. Let's feed them. God has given us everything we need. Amen.