

Proper 15 B  
August 19th, 2018  
John 6:51-58  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

## **Soul Food**

“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.”

Eat something and you will live forever. It is almost unbelievable.

Live forever. Most of the time that is how I approach life, and not from any sense of spirituality, but rather, that this current life will go on as it is forever. ‘As it was in the beginning,’ as the old conclusion to the prayer went, ‘is now, and ever shall be.’ But our days are numbered. Mortal life in a body on this earth is a finite quantity, and there are many reminders of it. We have only to look at or remember our aging parents. There go I. Hard to believe, but I bought a brand new truck two years ago, and it is showing signs of age: it already has over 42,000 miles on it. My truck, as strong and new as it still feels will age rapidly, much faster than I will, and God willing I will outlast it. Maybe.

What happened to our mortality? We are occasionally aware of our mortality, despite the efforts of advertisers to suppress this awareness. Many sell tonics to hide wrinkled skin, so called ‘age spots’ and greying hair. And we consumers spend billions trying to deny or cover up the simple truth of our mortality. It may work for a while, but the truth wins out eventually for all of us.

There is a part of us that wants this life to go on forever, though as our bodies age, we begin to question the wisdom of that. Like the George Harrison song from the 1970's said, “All Things Must Pass.” It is hard for me to accept that I am one of those things. Yet it is the body and the notion of the little word “I” that passes, and something else more essential of each of us lives on. That something else is your soul. So we should be concerned about our mortality and use it to shape our lives on this earth. The soul is what we are talking about feeding and living on eternally today. This is real soul food.

Bread and wine are common images for what sustains human life. Bread is very obvious, because we need food to fuel our bodies and keep them going. We also need liquid, and yes, wine is symbolic of that also.

In first century Israel the water supply was limited and precious. For the most part, these were hot, arid desert lands. Water was not to be wasted. People didn't take showers, and having a bath was not a daily ritual either, but something the well-to-do might enjoy. People cleaned themselves using olive oil, spreading it on their skin, and scraping it off. Not only did this clean dead cells, it also moisturized their skin in this hot climate. Most water was also not safe to drink by itself. And so it was often mixed with wine. This wine was thick and syrupy, and was diluted in the water as it purified the same for consumption. So wine was very much a figure of daily life and when Jesus uses it as an example, it is to say, do this, remember daily, remember what God has done for you every time you sit down to eat. Bless these common elements and ask me to come into them. The common food was no longer common, but very uncommon, very special indeed. It now became soul food to nourish something else beside the belly. Eating and drinking it brings new life to those who partake of it. And this new and very real life of the soul is immortal, not mortal like our bodies.

The Eucharist is all about food for the soul. The Body and Blood of Jesus sustain this spiritual life, that these days cries out in great hunger, for there seems to be a spiritual famine in our land. For all of our material blessings, all of the abundance of the earth's bounty and food, we are for the most part, not very happy campers. Why? Because such food, such material sustenance is like the manna which kept the Israelites going in the wilderness. They ate of it. It sustained them, and then they died.

In the Garden of Eden in the first book of the Bible, Adam and Eve were instructed not to eat of the fruit of two trees: One was the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the other was the Tree of Life which could make them immortal, like God God'self. In Genesis 3:22 we hear: And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

Well guess what. God in God's generosity and love for God's creatures, has given us the fruit of the tree of life, that we might live on with God forever. The tree of life is the cross, and its fruit is Jesus. Eat of the fruit of the tree of life, and you will never die, and that fruit God gives us freely.

You are what you eat. In the 1960's they had a saying which went like this: you are what you eat. This is very true. If you eat the body and blood of Christ, you are transformed, you are changed forever into the likeness of Christ, that those who meet you, meet the One who lives in you. Your heart and spirit is nourished and changed into the love which God showed you, you now show to others.

Wisdom has built her a house: "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." AMEN