

John 6:51-58
August 15, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Recently, Amanda and I attended a wedding and as is customary there was no shortage of flowers. This wedding had some of the biggest bouquets I have ever seen bursting with color and adding to the joy and love shared on that day. Flowers are some of the most beautiful things that blossom forth from the abundance of God's goodness. They give in so many ways. They provide the sweet nectar of life consumed by butterflies, bees, birds, and other living creatures. Their fragrance is captivating and the inspiration behind countless perfumes and colognes. They say "I love you" in any language. Flowers provide comfort when people need it most. They brighten a cloudy day and so often put a smile upon the face of those receiving them.

Flowers give. They reveal the abundance, creativity, majesty, diversity, and fruitfulness of the God who made them. Yet, flowers must first receive. Receive fertile soil for the tiny seed to gently be sown into by the gardener. Receive droplets of water from the skies above or the shower of a hose or watering can. Receive the light and warmth of the sun. Flowers must receive pollen from another plant to be able to produce seeds and give the world a continuous supply of their beauty.

We so often speak about giving. We live it out in worship as we give of our time to be present. We give of our talents to assist in a variety of ways. We give financial contributions to further the mission of the church in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and loving our neighbor, especially those who may be in need. I have often heard it said, "To give is better than to receive." St. Francis of Assisi said something similar, "For it is in giving that we receive." Even Acts 20:35 references Jesus to have stated, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; although, that saying of Jesus is not located in any of our gospels.

I don't think any of these statements are wrong. We were created by the grand Giver. Being made in God's likeness, giving is woven, embedded and part of our very being. As Christians, giving is our natural response to grace showered upon us through the Word that took upon human flesh and blood. I suspect each of us can think of a moment in which we gave of ourselves, served in some capacity, and received infinitely more in return.

Yet, like a flower, we must first receive. John 1:16 tells us, "From his (i.e., the Word or Jesus) fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." The Word has met the world through his incarnation. He has shed his very blood. Given of us very flesh. In order that "everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus has been pulling out all of teaching techniques in this sixth chapter, even pushing the envelope using various kinds of imagery and metaphorically describing himself as the "bread of life." Perhaps, even to the point beyond human understanding with talk about eating and drinking his flesh and blood. Words that challenged his hearers then and may continue to push our own comprehension to the brink. Yet, that is what Jesus and subsequently, John both desired their followers to do -- move beyond all those things that keep them from entering fully into communion with Jesus.

Sometimes we simply need to let go of trying to make sense of everything in order to be drawn closer to Jesus and receive the all-encompassing love, and fullness of his grace. which flows through every ounce of His body and His being. It's easy in this passage to really get hung up on Jesus' speaking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. At first glance it's simply repulsive. It doesn't make sense. Is this John's attempt to impart his Eucharistic theology and understanding of the Lord's Supper to the community he was writing to? Was Jesus even speaking about the Lord's Supper when he spoke these words? Scholars have been debating that for centuries.

Receive me Jesus seems to be reminding his listeners. Live in the glorious relationship I offer. Feed on the living bread that came down from heaven. Bread that gives life. Indeed, Jesus is pushing with every word, with every image, with every metaphor, with every ounce of his earthly body and his divine wisdom to move us beyond all those things we cling to for life. He is driving us beyond our

human understanding of God and into an expanded view of just who God is. Just who Jesus is. He is thrusting us beyond previous held assumptions or judgments into receiving with an open heart.

The living bread, the Word of God made flesh, has come down and is indeed in, with, under, and all around us in so many ways. Jesus Christ longs for us to feast in Him, chew on His every word, absorb his every ounce of love, savor his forgiveness that knows no limits, drink in his goodness, be nourished with his grace, and be sustained through the gift of life bought with his body and blood.

So how do we receive this receive this Bread of Life? The Spirit is at work right now, right here as we gather in worship tilling the soil, planting the seeds of faith, watering and feeding the blossoming flowers as we receive the abundant, unending, unconditional gift of grace and love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord. We receive Jesus through the written, spoken and living word of God found in scripture. We receive Jesus as we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We receive Jesus through the gift of communion with one another, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, our life together as his body in the world. We receive the forgiveness of sin offered through his death and resurrection through the words of pardon he offers here. We receive Jesus through the gift of prayer. The lifeline we have to communicate with him at all times and in all places. We receive Jesus through the meal Jesus prepares, offers, and invites us his church to share together. In and through the bread, wine or juice and the words, “given” and “shed for you.” The holy meal in which the church is assured of the promise that where “two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20).

As we receive Jesus we are forever changed. We grow through the fullness of his grace. Our hardened hearts are softened. Our eyes see more clearly. It reminds me of a class on the Bible I was once part of. One of the students, a woman probably in her sixties, had spent her entire life dwelling in a particular translation of the Bible, the word of God. And then, one day, a devotion in class was focused on a different translation of the Bible. The words seemed to leap off the pages in a way she had not previously experienced. Her eyes widened. Her smile lengthened. Her mind opened and the joy of Jesus she just received flowed forth

from her in a rush of excitement, glee, and happiness. She had received the living word of God. No that she hadn't received it before, or the Spirit wasn't at work amidst the other translation of the text. It's just that she finally allowed herself to be open to the possibility God might just speak through other translations and versions of the Bible. She had received the bread of life that came down from heaven. She had received the fullness of his grace.

Let us pray. Lord, you are the bread of life. Guide us to move beyond all that separates us from you. In everything, help us give thanks for the bread you offer – your body and blood – your life so that we might have life. May we feast on your love, be fed with your words, and filled with the power of your Spirit so that we may give so others too may receive and experience the fullness of your grace. Amen.