

## You Are What You Eat

John 6:51-58

August 16, 2015

The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

The Rev. Dr. Ritva H. Williams

Did you hear what Jesus said? “Eat my flesh. Drink my blood. If you don’t, you’ll die. If you do, you’ll live forever.” If we are really honest, we can admit that the first time we really heard these words our gut response was probably something like “Ew, yuk! That’s gross!” How could it not be? Jesus says, “eat my flesh,” and we wonder who are you — Zombie Jesus? Jesus says, “drink my blood,” and we wonder what now — Vampire Jesus?

The first time Jesus said these words to crowds of people in Capernaum, masses of them were so grossed out, they left in disgust. So why wouldn’t we be disgusted too? Or at least puzzled, trying to figure out how the Jesus who tells us to eat his flesh and drink his blood connects with the Jesus who tells us to love one another as he has loved us.



One way to make that connection is through a kind of bio-ethical perspective. You have all heard the adage “you are what you eat.” Everything you eat becomes not just part of the fabric of your body — your skin and bones, your organs and muscles — but also part of your inner being.<sup>1</sup>

This idea, that you are what you eat, is not only common among traditional peoples both ancient and modern, but taken very seriously. Among some tribal peoples, it is believed that if you eat a lot of chicken you have chicken energy. You move around quickly in a scattered state. If you eat a lot of beef you have heifer energy. You move slowly, powerfully and deliberately.

Ancient Israelites were not allowed to eat blood or fat, especially the fat around the liver of an animal. As one rabbi explained it, animals have souls, and the life of the animal is in its blood. To eat its blood, or its blood-filled liver, or the fat that surrounds it was to consume the animal’s soul and so become like that animal.<sup>2</sup> So the ancient Israelites limited their diet to vegetables, grains and a few herbivores. They did not eat animals that were predators or carrion eaters or any of the small helpless critters which swarm upon the earth. You are what you eat. Dine on predators and carrion eaters and you’ll begin to behave like predators and carrion eaters, devouring the small

<sup>1</sup> [www.webmd.com/beauty/skin/foods-for-healthy-skin-you-are-what-you-eat](http://www.webmd.com/beauty/skin/foods-for-healthy-skin-you-are-what-you-eat).

<sup>2</sup> Russell Rathbun, “You Are What You Eat - Does Jesus want us to become God?” at <http://thq.wearesparkhouse.org/new-testament/ordinary20bgospel/>.

and helpless critters of this earth.<sup>3</sup> Predators and carrion eaters don't do well at building community. The small and helpless whose lives are dominated by fear don't do so well at building community.

Jesus says, "Eat my flesh. Drink my blood. Consume my soul. Let me become part of you, not just your head or your heart, but every nook and cranny of your entire being, every tiny capillary in every cell of your body, your little toe and your ear lobe."<sup>4</sup> To those who accept this invitation, Jesus promises life (6:53), eternal life here and now already (6:54), abiding in him and he in them (6:56). Jesus promises that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood will be raised up on the last day (6:54), and will live through him forever (6:57-8).

Jesus has this strange conversation about eating his flesh and drinking his blood with the same crowds of people that he fed with five loaves of bread and two fish. These people want to make him king so that they will never be hungry again (6:15, 34). Jesus responds that if that is what they really want then they need something entirely different — to eat his flesh and drink his blood. What Jesus offers them, and to us, is not just bread to fill our bellies, but himself as soul-food to nourish and nurture our souls, our true selves — our child of God selves.

The point of this Gospel text is perhaps best illustrated by Salvador Dali's painting of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We see a stone table around which six sets of twins kneel in prayer and worship. On the table is a cup of wine and loaf of bread broken in half. Behind the table is a lake or sea with hilly islands. Two boats float in the water, another is pulled up on the sandy shore. But what dominates the painting are two glowing, transparent figures. Christ seated behind the table, points both to himself and to the giant torso — God — whose arms span the width of the picture. Pentagon shaped windows with beams that become transparent as they touch the earth, frame the scene, and indicate that this is a dodecahedron or 12-sided space, an ancient symbol for heaven.



What Dali is trying to capture in this painting is the idea of a sacrament as a visible sign of an invisible reality. The visible reality is the bread and wine on the table. The invisible reality is Christ, God and heaven which not only surround and embrace the visible reality,<sup>5</sup> but are actually and really present in, with, under and through what is material and tangible. The concept that Dali tries to portray in this painting is equally true if we replace the bread and wine

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Douglas, "The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus," JSOT 59 Sept 1993: 2-23.

<sup>4</sup> adapted from Brian Stoffregen at <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/john6x51.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Anthony Novak, "Misunderstood Masterpiece: Salvador Dali's 'The Sacrament of the Last Supper,' in *America*, November 5, 2012 Issue at <http://americamagazine.org/issue/misunderstood-masterpiece>.

with a Bible, or if we replace the table with a baptismal font or even a hospital bed. Christ promises to be with us and for us and *in us* always no matter what.

In a few minutes we will baptize Eden Eve Schulte. At 9:30am David Howard Miller will be baptized, and then together with his partner Kyle they will affirm their faith. In the sacrament of Holy Baptism, Christ is present in, with, under and through the water, washing and anointing them for new life, pouring the gift of the Holy Spirit into their hearts and minds, and claiming them for God. It is one of those God's work, our hands things. Christ is the one who accepts, affirms and claims each of us in the waters of baptism just as we are — even if we are so new to this world that we cannot yet walk or talk, regardless of our age or size or color or race or ethnic origin or sexual orientation or gender identity. Christ accepts us just as we are for a purpose — to nurture and nourish the image of God in each of us, empowering us participate in God's mission for the world.

In response, the baptized commit themselves to Christ's purpose by living among God's faithful people, coming together to hear God's Word and share in the Lord's Supper, to share the good news of God in Christ through their own words and deeds, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. In all of these ways, Christ nourishes and nurtures our true selves — our child of God selves — by gathering us into a communities of broken people seeking healing in prayer and worship, by eating and drinking the bread of life, by speaking words of forgiveness, comfort and encouragement, serving and being served, lifting up the needy and oppressed.

We are what we eat. We become what we consume. We are shaped and formed by the food we eat, the books we read, the music we listen to, the company we keep, the values we embrace, the activities we commit ourselves too. Jesus invites to eat his flesh and drink his blood so that in time we will become more and more our true beloved child of God selves, loving one another as he loves us. Amen.