

Here we are.

We are in the fourth week of listening to Jesus and learning about the Bread of Life.

There are many angles that preachers could have taken last week but, on the surface, the crowd was grumbling about Jesus. This week, there is a shift. They are now grumbling and fighting among themselves.

In verse 52, we hear it play out:

At this, the Jews started **fighting** among themselves: “How can this man serve up his flesh for a meal?”

They were confused and they wanted answers. As they looked at Jesus, they saw a human. Yet, this human was talking about a divine identity and the two simply did not compute.

The tough part about this dispute and arguing is that we can not just snicker and laugh and shake our head at them. The reason is fairly simple. Here we are: 2,000 years later and we are still fighting over this concept. There are churches and denominations who have departed ways on the Eucharist, the Bread of Life.

Each one of us is different. However, I love how the Gospel of John tackles issues. John is both a historian and a theologian. His desire is not only to record what happens but he wants to point to a greater point.

He does this frequently by question asking.

In our Gospel reading, the dispute and fighting comes in a form of a question: How can this man give us flesh to eat?

In other places in his book, there are questions from Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and Pilate. Listen in to their questions:

Nicodemus asks, “How can anyone be born after growing old?”

Woman asks, “Where do you get that living water?”

Pilate asks, “What is truth?”

So, John, the historian shares with us the life of Jesus. He shares with us the signs that Jesus performs **THEN** he uses questions to invite the readers to think deeply about what those signs means.

I think that we can build courage through the reading of John and learn that it is good, very good to ask questions. The ability to ask the right questions can bust down the door in our quest for wisdom.

Speaking of wisdom, our first reading came from the Book of Wisdom; known as Proverbs. In the text, Proverbs talked about bread and wine. It shares that it is a rich symbol of abundant life and what it means to become wise and walk in the way of insight.

Now, back to the question at hand. Once again, Jesus answers the question in an unexpected manner. This frustrated the leaders of the day to no end.

Jesus does not focus on the how. If Jesus chose this method, we might have a better understanding of the Eucharist. We could share a clean-cut three-point exercise on how Jesus can give us flesh to eat. But, Jesus goes in a different direction. Instead of answering the how, he goes to the why. Since Jesus focuses in on the why, let’s take a quick look at that.

Reframing the question, it might look like this:

“Why should we partake of the body and blood of Jesus?”

If we partake in the body and blood of Jesus, we are fully participating in the life of Jesus. When we participate in the life of Jesus, we will have three benefits. Those benefits include:

- (1) Eternal Life
- (2) Raised Up on the Last Day
- (3) True Food and True Drink

When I think about the text and the benefits, the extension of these is that truth is not just the difference between right and wrong or knowledge and ignorance. Instead, the truth is broadened and we have the ability to see the world as God wants us to see it.

John intertwines truth and love beautifully.

I am going to make a “pivot”. That word is almost becoming an over-used dirty word for me. In the pandemic, we have heard this so often. We need to be ready at a moment-notice to make a pivot and change what we are doing.

Back to the pivot in my sermon. I have been thinking about how this text impacts me today as a pastor as I lead Bay View. We are in the midst of final planning and preparation for the Fall programming.

Two of the programming components that are tied to this text are First Communion and Confirmation class. We are looking at different approaches on how we can engage our children and youth as they begin their faith journey. Sharing with them about Jesus and the Meal and the importance is going to be a crucial component of life together.

When we examine the John text more deeply; we see that the fighting was within the religious community. Many times, there is fighting among religious communities today; both on communion and other theological issues.

It does sadden me that the Table where the bread is broken is where our church has been the most broken. I am sure that has to be extremely troubling to God. At the table, many have been cut off, denied communion or looked upon with a suspicious and judgmental eye.

I am thankful that the ELCA has an open table and that I can serve all; no question asked. I am thankful that we have been able to reach out to our Reformed siblings and have created full-communion partnerships.

This has happened because we have been able to go back to Jesus and look at the why and not the how. We may not fully understand how Jesus is in the bread or if the bread turns into Jesus **BUT** we have come to an understanding and belief that Christ is present in the sacrament and we also receive Christ when we partake.

Maybe we have a deep sigh because we can not explain the how. We have to live into the mystery. We get to celebrate that we get to come to this table and receive Christ. The Eucharist is a moral and a mystical meal.

For those of you who have already affirmed their baptism and for the students who will be affirming their baptism, it is important for us to remember that Christ will abide with us and them forever. In our affirmation, we affirm that we will

- live among God’s faithful people
- hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper

May we remember and come together as a church community and celebrate the Eucharist as often as we can. Jesus is presence in the ordinary things and ordinary actions.

As you taste the bread, you may not know the how, but you can be assured of tasting Jesus and knowing that Jesus is abiding in you.

**AMEN**