

FLESH & BLOOD

John 6:51-58

New Store/Maysville Presbyterian Churches

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

15 August, 2021

When you hear the term “flesh & blood,” what do you think of? Perhaps, you think of your children, or grandchildren? Perhaps thoughts of your brothers and sisters arise. Or, your whole extended family comes into view — your parents, grandparents, aunts & uncles, cousins, siblings, and behind them are great-grandparents, their brothers and sisters, and their children, and further back, great-greats, and then great-great-greats, and so on fading back in time and view.

I doubt that is what you think of when you hear Jesus talk about “flesh & blood;” especially in this passage which we just read from the *Gospel according to John*. The context seems to be totally different. In this morning’s New Testament verses, we hear of eating flesh and drinking blood, and if you’re like me when I first read this way back in my youth, thoughts are more like, “Yuck, that sounds like cannibalism! No wonder the Judeans were arguing and complaining.” The image here isn’t appealing, even if you weren’t Jewish or kosher.

So, is there any way to reconcile the two thoughts on “flesh & blood?” One way is to see the obvious — our passage is talking about the connection between Holy Communion and Jesus. The language used by the Church to describe the elements of the Lord’s Supper are tied very closely to Jesus’ words here in *John 6*. To eat Christ’s flesh and to drink His blood is symbolized in eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine. In fact, a lot of Biblical scholars seem to pretty much stop there. They go round and

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round to make this point, and I agree that Jesus is making that point here. But, are there further insights?

Remember how this whole line of thought developed in *John* — Jesus fed a multitude of people from several loaves of bread and a few fish? People who had only heard about this itinerant preacher started following Him, looking for another free meal. While Jesus moves away from this context, we shouldn’t forget that He satisfied our needs of hunger which drew or draws

us to Him.

One of the things to remember when reading the *Gospel according to John* is that you almost always have to read it on at least two levels — the plain, obvious understanding of the text and a deeper, meditative level. The image of Jesus as the Bread of Life has been developed by the John the Gospel writer in several ways: Eucharistical-ly, as I've already mentioned, and Incarnation-ally, that is, as referring to Jesus' embodiment of God's own self in the flesh and blood.

How well do we wrap our minds around the belief that God became flesh & blood in Jesus? Do we shy away from this? Are we awed by this? Do we actually disbelieve because the idea of the divine and human coming together is so overwhelming or so impossible that a part of our minds rejects the concept?

Whether it is the “work” of faith or the receiving of communion elements, the focus of the Bread of Life is still in, through, and as the person of Jesus,

and ultimately, His and our relationship with God, and the result is life eternal. It is this language spoken of abiding or remaining in, with, and through Jesus that draws us to the language of intimacy and shared life.

So, how do we share in the life of Jesus? How do we participate in His ongoing work of the Kin-dom? What does it mean that we have life ongoing through Him? What does it mean to be raised on the last day with Jesus? What are we called to do when we live because of or for the sake of Jesus?

It's easy for us to sit back and not be engaged with those around us because we're secure in our belief that Jesus is Lord and Savior. It's far more challenging to consider that we are invited — called — to get out of our comfort zones, to reach out to others and to share God's bounty with them through Jesus — we are to be His Body in this world, feeding others both with physical food as well as spiritual.

Somewhere along the timeline of Christian tradition, we separated the physical from the spiritual. In Jesus' time, there was next to no separation.

The Bread of Life that nourishes our soul is the same who provides

The Bread of Life that nourishes our soul is the same who provides nourishment for our bodies. Love and compassion go hand-in-glove with satisfaction — both spiritually and physically. When we eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood at the Communion Table, we become Him and He becomes us.

There's the connection with our normal idea of flesh and blood. Just like the biological connection to our ancestors, to our family, becomes an integral

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part of who we are, we have the physical and spiritual connection to Jesus through His flesh and blood. And this connection doesn't end there. The bread Jesus offers is more than literal bread, it is Life itself. This life to which Jesus calls us is to be shared, just as His bread is to be shared. If we disconnect Jesus' words of life from our contemporary life and the issues we see and know then we miss something — something very important.

When we live as the Body of Christ, we become Jesus' flesh and blood — we become His sisters and brothers; we carry on the work of His kingdom — to feed others, to invite them to join in God's work, to show compassion to all, and to love without reservation.

The good news presented to us by Jesus is that He is the source and hope of life for all the world. As God's gift He calls us to live a Christian life of thanksgiving for what God has done, and as witnesses to God's promises to the entire world. This also involves being challenged by difficult questions which confront us in each moment of our lives as to how we are going to live. These questions have been with us since the beginning of the Church. As we contemplate what God might be asking of us this day, let us consider Paul's injunction to the Christians at Ephesus — "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved Children, live in love, as Christ loved us, and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Let us pray: Holy and mighty God, You give us all good things needed for life. Through Christ Jesus You invite us to participate in His ongoing work to make visible Your Kingdom which is without end. Let our lives show

Your love and compassion; let us be Your hands and feet; let us be for others the reflection of and witness to all that You've done for the world in, through, and as Jesus the Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.