

This Teaching is Difficult

John 6:60-69

When this crowd declares that this teaching is difficult with Jesus right there with them, we know 2000 years later with only these written words that we might have some troubles with these words also. Jesus has just taught from last week that the church must eat Jesus flesh as the bread of life and drink his blood to quench our eternal spiritual thirst. To this, the crowds proclaim, "This teaching is difficult." As our passage goes on, we hear the teaching is actually so difficult that some people stop following Jesus. What Jesus taught here caused people to seriously reconsider what it meant to follow Jesus. Why did this teaching cause people to stop following Jesus? What is so hard about this teaching that people would turn away?

Let us consider these questions with the guidance of the Spirit. Let us pray, epule kākou: "Dear God, you have promised that Jesus' yoke is easy, and his burden is light, yet here we have a difficult teaching. Teach us to be your children. Amen."

Just to refresh our memories from last week, here is the teaching that has people talking. Jesus says, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them." This passage is as close as the Gospel of John gets to teaching about the Lord's Table, or Communion. The word communion means to be connected, to have fellowship with. In John, Jesus uses the word abide to mean communion. So why would John talk about communion here as Jesus is discussing bread, rather than like the other Gospels where communion is associated with the Holy Week and Jesus' crucifixion? Even the placement of these bread stories in the story of Jesus' life is different in John, placing communion in the **beginning** of the story of Jesus' ministry instead of at the end like Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John is emphasizing that it is **Jesus** that feeds us as Christians, that our very nourishment for life comes from and through Jesus. The Gospel of John presents the act of communion with Jesus as an act of our continuing faith life, abiding in God represented by the act of eating daily nourishment through Jesus. Because John views communion with Christ differently than the other Gospels, it offers us the opportunity to think about the Lord's Supper in new ways. John gives us a new way to consider our communion table together. Many people think the communion table only commemorates Jesus' death. But here, the Gospel of John, we learn the act of taking communion commemorates abiding in Jesus' LIFE. Eating the bread is about taking nourishment from Jesus and growing and flourishing in a **life** of faith, a Supper with the living Lord that offers us living bread for our spiritual journey **in this life**. John tells the communion story as a story of **life**, a story of nourishment, a story of **abiding** as a community of faith.

As we learned last week, these are all symbols of our life in God, not literal ways of being with God. Today we learn a new metaphor about communion, being with Jesus and one another **in life**. The act of eating is central to being human, about taking nourishment and living. Communion with Jesus is how we **live in Christ**, and our passage takes this even a step further. Communion with Jesus, eating Jesus as the bread, brings the **eternal life** of God to our spirit. John says that our flesh needs bread to live, but our spirit needs Jesus to live, and both are metaphors for **life**. And in the case of the living bread of Jesus it brings us **eternal life**.

It is through Jesus, as God come to earth in flesh, that we gain access to God. John speaks about Jesus using many metaphors about our human access to God: Jesus is the man sent from heaven, Jesus is the Holy One of God, Jesus is the bread of life, the path to understanding and abiding with God, Jesus is the doorway to walk into the presence of God, the shepherd who watches over us and protects us. These are all symbols and metaphors of how humans gain access to God through Jesus.

And yet, when Jesus teaches these ways of accessing God as a metaphor and symbol of eating Jesus and drinking his blood, the people around him chafe and say, "O Jesus, this teaching is difficult." As humans, we all want to consume the world, eating stuff and wealth and prosperity. But when communion with God is offered, when Jesus presents the bread of life, many people shrug and say this teaching, eating **Jesus as the bread of life**, is too difficult. Many humans want to eat wealth and riches without stopping to remember what the eating is about, stuffing their faces with rich food and forget about what the eating, or life, means.

But here, Jesus asks us as his followers to stop and consider the living bread of life. Jesus asks us to stop and consider our **relationship** with God and each other, pondering how we abide in Jesus and one another when we eat with intension and remembrance of how we are connected through our **lives**. Jesus says we cannot just eat bread to feed the body. We must eat spiritual bread to fill **us completely; body, soul, and spirit**. We cannot just treat the world as just a physical thing to be eaten and thrown away. **We must consume Jesus with full spiritual intension**. Living as full humans as we follow Christ means we feed the body and the spirit together abiding, or eating, in communion with God.

Next week we will celebrate Music Sunday, and the week after we will celebrate Communion Sunday. We will gather with Christians all around the world as we eat the bread of communion of Jesus together. We will be in communion, that is, we will abide with one another and Jesus as we are in communion with God; abiding as the church and abiding in Jesus through eating the bread of life and drinking the cup of love. Our communion meal together will declare that we are physical beings AND spiritual beings who gain our eternal nourishment through Jesus, the bread of our life. Eating the bread of heaven does not give us immortality, just as eating manna did not give the Jews immortality. As humans, we will still die. But eating the bread of heaven in Jesus brings a new life as children of God, an **eternal spiritual life beginning now**. Our spiritual connection when we eat communion feeds us with the eternal bread of life and love of God. Communion celebrates the victory of life over death, the victory of the bread of life over emptiness and despair. In **Christ** there is nourishment, and hope and knowledge that this meal of living bread lasts forever. The Lord's Supper is eating the **bread of life** in Jesus, filling us with life eternal. The communion table is a meal of eternal life served to us as the bread of Jesus. This teaching is difficult, but true. Mahalo ke Akua. Amene.