

Karen Hollis – sermon  
John 6:56-69  
August 26, 2018

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This has been quite a journey over the past 5 weeks through Jesus' teaching on the bread of life. We began with Jesus feeding the 5,000, followed by disciples seeking Jesus out and Jesus challenging them to consider why they are coming to find him . . . because your tummies are full or because you're ready to go deeper? Whether they're ready to receive the bread that gives life always. Jesus reveals himself to them as the bread of life that came down from heaven . . . and people grumble at this. But Jesus continues . . . the bread of life Jesus gives to the world is his flesh. If you eat his flesh and drink his blood you will receive eternal life. Blood is a symbol of life – it sustains life. If we chew the bread of life and drink the blood of the new covenant, we will abide in Christ and Christ will abide in me. I saw this all coming up in the lectionary for the last couple of months and I knew it was going to be a lot of content. I knew it would be a

personal challenge to look deeper at the flesh and blood language, for instance; like we did last week, I had to look deep into the theology and ask myself what is it about this word that I struggle with? I think mostly it's the visceral part of death that just biologically shakes us to the core. We don't want to know about our blood – if we're having to think about it, for most of us, there's probably something wrong. It was a good exercise to dig into this topic. It's a good exercise in general to stop and spend time with the things that challenge us in our faith.

In the winter of 2007 I was in my first year of seminary and buckled down for what I called my "Jesus Quarter." I had Christology Tuesday mornings, which is essentially the theology of Christ, theology of Jesus; and on those afternoons I had Christian Scriptures, a class on what we know as the New Testament. Most of us were in our first year or equivalent of the program. I'll never forget Mike Raschko, the Roman Catholic priest who was my very favourite professor and taught the Christology course, leaning on the podium part way through his lecture. He said, "how are you guys doing with all of this?" referring, of course to the content of the class. While the class was

rigorous and academic, our faith is not. He knew that while he was teaching future ministers, he was also teaching disciples of Christ, who were being formed in Jesus' teachings just as much as we were preparing for ministry in this post-modern world.

As Jesus' disciples take stock on their relationship with Jesus at the end of his bread of life discourse, they offer a range of reactions from "this teaching is too hard" to "where else can I go?" This range in response reflects what is true in each of us. We struggle with various parts of our faith and yet we're drawn in. My minister growing up used to say, "faith is subjecting the parts of us that don't believe to the parts of us that do." (repeat) It's this process of deepening. We're not avoiding the aspects of the teaching that are hard for us, but following the part of us that is truly devoted to this walk and finding that growing edge that challenges us to go deeper. We enter a space where the "this teaching is too hard" part of us and the "where else can I go?" part take hands and walk together.

Meanwhile God invites us in; in the midst of our searching and discerning, God continues to seek relationship with us. Jesus proclaims

those who consume Jesus' body and blood, will abide in him and he in them. God blesses the space between Jesus and his followers and speaks through Jesus to invite people into relationship. God is steadfast in this invitation: abide with God . . . remain with God . . . for, as the Psalmist says, "a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; God bestows favour and honour. No good thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you." When we receive communion it is a reminder of God abiding in us. God makes a home in us; in turn we live in God, we live our lives within the collective body of Christ. And in turn we live in God, it is a symbiotic relationship, mutually life giving.

King Solomon, from the Hebrew scripture reading this morning, helped pave the way for this relationship; he made a home for God in the temple in Jerusalem. In the Jewish tradition, God lives in the Ark of the Covenant, but during the exodus, when they were wandering in the wilderness, God started out coming to Moses in a cloud on the mountain, far removed from the

people. With God's instruction, the community constructed a tabernacle, a kind of portable temple, with a special place for the Ark of the Covenant. When the construction was complete and everything was in place, God filled the tabernacle and guided their journey to the Promised Land. The Ark of the Covenant that was carried through the wilderness is the same one King David brought to Bethlehem and the same one King Solomon then brings to Jerusalem. Solomon sacrificed more animals than could be counted so that God would be pleased with the house Solomon made, so that God would dwell there. Solomon prays for God to be merciful and generous to all who come into the temple to meet God in prayer. This has been in the Jewish tradition the only way of encountering God: sacrificing at the temple to gain access to God.

When Jesus begins his ministry, God offers a new route to God through relationship with Jesus. No longer did one have to change money, purchase a pure animal, have it sacrificed to cleanse oneself for one's sins. God comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ. You are no longer at the mercy of the corrupt establishment. Jesus is the bread of life who freely offers life to the world. Come and receive everything you

need. Regardless of what's happening with us, all in, highly suspicious or conflicted, God offers each and every one of us a home and meets us where we are.

God's never going to force you to say yes to a particular teaching, rather God invites you into a relationship that just gets better and better the more you give yourself to it. More freedom, more dignity, regrets transformed, better boundaries, clearer vocation, more peace, deeper love and on and on. This relationship is always available to you; it is not based on geography or access to a building. Christ abides in you and you in Christ. What does the next level of yes look like for you? How are you approaching your growing edge in faith?

After many disciples left Jesus that day, Jesus turned to the 12 and asked, "do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered, "To whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Here at Christ Church, regardless of our church background, the Holy One of God is what we all have distinctly in common – we are Christian first. As we live into our life and call as a community of faith, we look to our relationship

with Christ to lead us into our full potential. And we have particular challenges that don't have easy answers, but we have built a foundation from which we can dig into them. And we're probably more than ready to do that work. It was God's invitation brought us together and the invitation remains to go deeper. God invites us to abide in Christ together that we may become clearer on who we are as a community of faith . . . that the identity we find may guide us in service of our island community. While we come from different places and live our faith in many different ways, we came together clear that first of all we are followers of Jesus Christ . . . and as we continue to discern God's call for us, it is crucial for us to continue deepening and depending on that relationship. Thanks be to God for the life God offers through Jesus Christ, the bread of life. Amen.