

Eating and Being

Pentecost 13 2024 + St. Andrew's Anglican Church
1 KINGS 2:10-12; 3:3-14; EPHESIANS 5:15-20; JOHN 6:51-58

+++

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Amen.

In last Sunday's sermon, we thought with the ancient Fathers of the Church about anger. And it resonated so much that it came up again at the Farm-Garden on Monday morning. We talked about how we'd been thinking about what we do with our anger and thinking about Jesus' own anger in the scriptures, as we picked beans and added manure to rows. The early Fathers of the Church understood the goal of our spiritual life to be something called *apatheia*: living in a state of such clarity that love is totally truthful and we are free united to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the work of the spiritual life, as they understood it, is to clearly know the movements of our hearts, or the passions as they called them, that impede this kind of freedom. What's good about anger, we remember from last week, is also what makes it dangerous and so one of the questions we must ask is "who does your anger serve?", way down at its core and in all of its layers: who does it serve? Our goal of course is to imitate Christ whose anger did not blind his Divine love. Christ who chose to give himself as bread for the world, to share the vulnerability of all humanity so that we might find rest for souls. A deep clarity and rest, the true satiation of the Bread of the Life, from which our anger can be clearly known and carefully engaged for the loving of our neighbour and the transforming of ourselves, the church and the world.

Anger and gluttony are linked in this ancient tradition and so its interesting this week that the letter to the Ephesians continues on into a warning to live wisely and not over fill ourselves, not indulge excess that lead to other excesses (gluttony or debauchery) but rather to be filled with the Spirit. What comes to mind for you when you hear the word gluttony?

Gluttony, in the understanding of the those early Fathers of the Church, is the search for what is more than necessary. And that search can look like extreme excess or it can look like excessive renunciation because both are based in an inability to know what we really need, in a denial of, or a losing touch with, our createdness, our reliance on God, on our neighbour and on our world. In the perspective of these ancient thinkers, Adam's sin was in fact gluttony: eating more than he needed in that apple was at the same time the desire to loose touch with his own createdness and become like GOD by his own devices. Our dependence, our relatedness, our connectedness: when we cannot hold the truth of these things we exploit and wreck what God has created be it ourselves or the world in which live which we know

all to well.¹ The call then, in the letter to the Ephesians this morning, to be filled not with excesses that just lead to more and other kinds of excess but with the Spirit. To be filled with the reality of who and what we are; to not loose touch with the marvellous Christian paradox that the more truly human, the more creaturely, the more dependent and connected we become, the more we come to share in the life of God.

And this is what our Gospel of John gives visceral words to this morning. We are continuing on in the Bread of Life dialogue from last week and we've reached the point where those listening start to take offence. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood," he says repeatedly. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will have eternal life, will abide in me and I in them, will live forever: eating and being creatures in relationship with God are totally bound up together. Not only will Jesus give of himself- his flesh and blood- on the cross to ensure eternal life for us but we will depend on him, on this gift of life like we depend on food and drink to live. And this kind of creaturely dependence is a really hard sell to our own pride and need for control. It's a really hard sell in our self-made culture where excess is glorified. We cannot live in real fullness of life, John tells us, without Christ just as we cannot live without food and without drink. We live because Christ lives in us.

And this is one of the very radical things we proclaim when we celebrate the Eucharist each Sunday. We come with open hands, with empty and dependent and beautifully creaturely hands. We are utterly dependent on Christ and we are deeply connected to each other. To be human is to be known in, and be together dependent on, this gift and exchange of Divine love and life. To be fed at Christ's Table with nothing less that the very life of God so that we might become like Christ because of our creatureliness not in spite of it (like Adam tried).

So as we enter a new week, we are invited to ask if there are places in our lives where we are searching for more than what is necessary? Where we are, for whatever reason, loosing touch with our createdness. And we can ask the same question we asked of anger: whom does this search serve? And as we honestly answer that question, may we hear Christ's invitation to the deep freedom of creaturely life, may we as the poet George Herbert put it when Love bade him welcome, may we sit and eat.

Amen.

The Rev'd Canon Anne Privett

¹ Quoting liberally from the same source as last week.

Williams, Rowan, *Apatheia and the Passions*. A series of lectures give at Mucknell Abbey UK. <https://mucknellabbey.org.uk/apatheia-and-the-passions-talks-by-rowan-williams/>