**Sermon Flesh and Blood**

 **Jesus said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.” This sentence was hard to hear for those gathered in the synagogue. His disciples started to complain along with the rest of the people. The words “eat my flesh and drink my blood” sounded gruesome. It’s a startling statement. Yet the idea of flesh and blood clearly appear in our Eucharist. However, we do change the word flesh during our Eucharistic rite.**

 **Listen to these two words we say during the Eucharist. We don’t seem to shy away from the word “blood,” but the word “flesh” changes to the word “body.” I can presume the word “flesh” is just too difficult a concept. Even today some of us might balk at the word “flesh”, and say such things as,” I prefer the word body. Or why should we use that word flesh? We’ve always said body.”**

**Here’s is an example from the word “flesh” being changed to “body” in our Eucharistic prayers. “Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat: this is my Body, which is given for you. And for many.’” We use the word ‘feed’ rather than “body” in only one sentence. Yet we seem to be used to these words- “feed on him in your heart by faith and thanksgiving.” But really if we listen to that word “feed” it seems odd to say, “feed on him in your heart.” Yet we’ve become used to hearing the word “feed” and it doesn’t seem to bother any of us. “Feed” is the closest we ever come in our service of using the word “flesh.” We receive the bread and wine with these words. “The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven, The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation.” What if I substitute “flesh” for “body”? The flesh of Christ the bread of heaven. It doesn’t sound right to me, perhaps not to you either.**

**The only way this lectionary reading makes any sense to me is if I read these words Jesus spoke after he said to eat his flesh and drink his blood. He went on to say to his disciples, “Do these words offend you?” Then he said to them, “… it is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is useless.” Jesus also said, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”**

**There’s a whole lot to unpack in these few words Jesus gave to his disciples. This is a very important thought when Jesus said the Sprit is real and flesh is useless. I believe the way we can understand his words is to bring them up to a spiritual level. When he told us to eat his flesh, it seems he’s speaking in a metaphorical and spiritual way. Jesus knows we can’t literally eat his flesh and drink his blood. But if we acknowledge the Eucharist as a mystery and a great gift from God and his son Jesus, we can experience the mystery and spiritual reality of eating his spiritual flesh.**

**Jesus also told his disciples, “The words that I spoke to you are spirit and life.” One thing Jesus was doing in his elevating the Eucharist to a Spiritual level was taking on the role of the ultimate sacrifice for all of us. Think of the time he lived in. Animal sacrifices were part of a religious experience. Jesus turned over the money changers tables in the Temple. In this one outrageous act of overturning their tables, he was saying,, he was through with the money changers’ tradition. He knew the foolishness of sacrificing animals for our sins and misdeeds. The animal sacrifice had become a farce. Because whether you were rich or poor, if you could afford to sacrifice a whole cow or a small bird, the animals that were supposed to be sacrificed quite often were simply brought to the sellers and sold again. In other words. this kind of sacrifice had turned into a just a way to make more money.**

**Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice for all our misdeeds and sins throughout all the ages. His sacrifice, with the background of what the money changers and sellers of animals for sacrifice were doing was simply making more money, helps us better understand Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice. His sacrifice makes a lot more sense if we know the background of how sacrificing animals had deteriorated in the time of Jesus. We today who partake of a Eucharist know we are not really drinking his blood and eating the flesh of his body. We know because of the Eucharist instituted by Jesus on the last night he spent with his disciples. We know the words and we honor them whenever we hear these words spoken. “On the night before he died for us, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.’ After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, ‘Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me.’"**

 **We hear the words of our Eucharistic service so often we might become immune to their meaning. I pray hearing some of these ancient words today will help all of us become more aware of the depth of this service. We are about to complete four weeks of Lectionary readings all on the bread of life. The way we celebrate the Eucharist was given to Jesus’ disciples on the night before he was arrested. The Eucharist is the very center and core of our worship. Remember what Jesus said to us this morning. “It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is useless.” Jesus also said, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”
 Every time we come to his holy table and partake of the mystical experience of eating his body and drinking his blood, we open our hearts just a little bit more. Amen**