

**Rev. Mary-Lloyd Brainard, Deacon**

**August 16, 2009**

11 Pentecost

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

Psalm 111

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. (Ps. 19: 14)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Jews were shocked! The words were not at all what they expected to hear and their meaning was beyond their understanding. "I am the living bread," Jesus said, " that came down from heaven and whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (Jn. 6:51)

It was probably a warm day and they were shoulder to shoulder in a crowded synagogue waiting to hear Jesus speak. They quickly assumed that Jesus was telling them that in order to have eternal life they must consume him as actual food! And even more shocking to the Jews was that Jesus suggested that they not only eat his flesh but drink his blood as well. The entire concept was totally unacceptable to them.

In Jewish teaching, blood was equated with life and all life belonged to God. Their dietary restrictions prevented them from drinking the blood of a slaughtered animal. The sheep and the cattle that they did eat had to be bled first and the blood then poured into the ground and covered with the earth. It is the procedure still followed today in Kosher slaughter. They were so saturated in Jewish belief and culture that to speak of drinking human blood, even symbolically, was something too terrible for a good Jew to even think about. Most of their leaders considered Jesus a fraud anyway and the suggestion that they eat human flesh and drink human blood confirmed what they claimed to know all along. Their inability to see beyond the literal meaning of Jesus' words left them stunned and confused - what did eating human flesh and drinking human blood possibly have to do with them?"

In declaring Himself the "living bread" and inviting them to eat of this bread in order to live forever Jesus was not recruiting a cult of cannibals, although Christians were later charged with such atrocities, but instead He was using a literary device to communicate a particular and very important truth. He was addressing a group of Jews who still questioned his identity. They had followed Him through the villages and towns; they had heard Him preach, saw him heal the sick, raise people from the dead and feed thousands from a few fish and loaves of bread but they still had their doubts. He was only a

carpenter's son, - a simple man from an ordinary small-town family. They murmured and complained among themselves and were baffled by the words that Jesus spoke. What was Jesus trying to tell them and why did he call himself "the living bread?"

When we think of bread, all sorts of images come to mind. It is probably one of the earliest foods that human beings ever made and we envision our ancestors as they hunted for grains, figured out how to grind them and mix them with other ingredients and then determine how to bake the mixture in the heat of an open fire so that they would have something to eat.

Bread is considered the staple of life! It satisfies our hunger and nourishes our bodies. We rarely have a meal that does not include a piece or two. We have toast for breakfast, sandwiches for lunch and we often put a selection of different breads on our dinner table. How many times have we enjoyed a wonderful bowl of soup and a piece of homemade bread fresh from the oven and said "that was all I needed!"

But Jesus clearly meant something much more than physical existence and within the context of a simple phrase, the words that Jesus spoke in the crowded synagogue on that warm day become very powerful. "I am the living bread, . . . and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The nourishment that Jesus offered the Jews, and the nourishment that he offers us, is spiritual nourishment. By accepting his gift and building a deep and lasting relationship with Him, He promises that we will have eternal life. He asks that we base our entire existence on Him and recognize Him in every corner of our lives - every day, everywhere we go and in everyone that we meet. Bottom line - bring Him down from our heads and into our hearts and get to know Him personally and not just someone we read about in a book.

Sometimes, just as the Jews did, we completely miss the point. WE DO NOT LISTEN WELL! We are too busy to stop and hear what God may be saying to us. Our jobs, our families, our community commitments take 26 hours of our day and if by chance we find ourselves with a minute or two left over, we check our calendar to see what we are suppose to be doing tomorrow. Sometimes our faith and our trust are just not strong enough to put ourselves in God's hands and accept that He leads the way and that He is the one that gives us the strength and the courage to move forward when life seems impossible. He never promised that our lives would be pain and trouble free but He did promise that He would always be there. He would be the "living bread" - the staple in our lives - always available to satisfy and feed us.

Many of you know that I have an ongoing affair with the printed word! Amazon.com, as well as every bookstore, and used book sale along the shoreline depend on my addiction! One of the most recent additions to my library is a book by David Adam entitled "The Road of Life - Reflections on Searching and Longing." Prior to his retirement he served for 13 years as the vicar of a small parish on Holy Island off the Northumbrian coast in the North Sea near the Scotland border and since that time he has published several collections of prayers and meditations on the Celtic tradition. The

village itself is less than an acre in size and boasts a year-round population of 150! Holy Island has remained a place of pilgrimage for over 1300 years and thousands of pilgrims from all over the world cross the sands to spend time there. Why? What are they searching for? It is safe to say that many come for the scenery, to take pictures and to be able to add it to their list of "places visited."

But as the title suggests, the large majority of them are searching for something that is missing in their lives. They come looking for a relationship with God - to pray in the small chapel - to ask for an "understanding mind" as Solomon did and in the words of Psalm 46 just to " Be still and know that *He* is God." Most admit to having busy schedules, family responsibilities, demanding jobs and full calendars and quiet time with God is not only way down on their list of priorities but often impossible. Their time on Holy Island can become a blessed time and according to David Adam , "we need to let the grace of God work in our lives in order to accept the gift of His presence and his love."

We all need a Holy Island! I have spent time in England and stood on the shores of the North Sea but I have never crossed the sand to pray in that small chapel. You and I can find our Holy Island in another place, closer to home for now, and know that God's grace, that living bread , comes to us in a lot of different ways and in many different places.

This morning it will come to us in community through the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. We will come to this table and kneel together at this communion rail, raise our hands to receive the wafer and share in the cup of wine and hear those words, "the body of Christ, the bread of heaven" - "the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation." And with our "Amen" accept Jesus Christ into our lives as the "bread" that sustains us, strengthens us and guides us through our days. We acknowledge that it is His presence that helps us to love where we never thought we could and to forgive where we thought it impossible. It is His grace that enables us to reach out to help others and to look into the corners where so many people are lost and forgotten.

In my ordination service, almost 11 years ago, we used the ancient call of the prophet Isaiah as the Old Testament reading. The Lord asked, "whom shall I send, and who will go for me?" And Isaiah answered, "Here am I - send me!"

That call summons each of us to **respond** to the presence of God in our lives every day. Filled to the brim with the "living bread" - **renewed** and **refreshed** at His table, whether it be on Sunday or Wednesday or any other time that we are present for the celebration of the Eucharist, we become strong, confident and loving disciples of Jesus Christ.

Amen.