

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

August 22, 2021 – PENTECOST 13/PROPER 16, YR. B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*The Jesus Diet*”

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18 (The Israelites vow to serve the Lord)  
Psalm 34:15-22 (The Lord ransoms the righteous)  
Ephesians 6:10-20 (Believers are to put on the armor of God)  
St. John 6:56-69 (Many find Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life difficult)

---

I'm trying to lose weight, but it keeps finding me. Last week, I bought a cupcake without sprinkles. Diets are hard. I mean, if we're not meant to have midnight snacks, why is there a light in the fridge?<sup>1</sup> Anyone else here concerned about dieting? I know for a fact that a few of you are, and you have my deepest empathy. As part of trying to take off some pounds, I've given up eating bread. Not that I eat a lot of it to start with, but during the COVID lockdown, I became closely acquainted with Dave's Killer Bread's “Raisin' the Roof” loaves. Buttered with cinnamon sprinkled on top, it definitely makes the best raisin toast *in the universe!*

Today's Gospel contains the final part of Jesus' discussion about Him being the Bread of Life. In reflecting on this, I wondered, what if, instead of avoiding earthly bread and trying to eat less of several other types of foods, we went on a Jesus Diet? What would that be like?

For three out of the past four Sundays, Jesus has been using symbolism and metaphors about Himself as bread, which could be interpreted a number of ways. But in John 6:56-57, our Lord gets to the difficult crux of the matter when He states: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.” Many of those who heard this thought Jesus must be talking about cannibalism! They were so disgusted and turned off, they declared, “This is a hard teaching.” And with that, they turned back and no longer followed our Lord. It was definitely a diet they couldn't stomach. But by rejecting the Jesus Diet, they missed out on knowing God in Person, and receiving His gift of life everlasting.

If *we* stop following Jesus simply because He has “hard teachings,” we're in trouble. Because, as in today's Gospel story, Jesus has many other hard sayings that are difficult to follow: “Love your enemies and pray for those who abuse you” (Matthew 5:44); “lend, expecting nothing in return” (Luke 6:35); “sell everything and follow Me” (Matthew 19:21); “anyone who says ‘you fool’ is liable to the fires of hell” (Matthew 5:21). Think about that one, the next time some jerk cuts you off in traffic!

So why did Jesus' disciples hang in there, even though they might not have fully understood Christ's teaching on His body and blood. The answer is faith: They believed He was the Holy One of God, the Messiah. Peter sums up why they have no other option than to follow Christ when he replies: “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

One can imagine that, at the Last Supper, they may have come to recognize Christ was speaking of Holy Communion. After all, He said, “This is my body” and “this is my blood”—not “this is a symbol of my body” or “this is a metaphor for my blood.” If we understand that Jesus is talking about the Eucharist, are we to take literally, “whoever eats of me will live [eternally],” such that we believe we are saved by this Sacrament? Well, the answer is “no” and “yes.”

In 1 Corinthians 11:27, St. Paul writes about the sin of partaking of the consecrated bread and wine without faith in Christ's death for our sins. Here, I'm reading this verse from the Phillips translation: "whenever you eat this bread or drink of this cup, you are proclaiming that the Lord has died for you, and you will do that until he comes again. So ... whoever eats the bread or drinks the wine without due thought is making himself like one of those who allowed the Lord to be put to death without discerning who he was." In other words, we are to discern, or recognize, that when we partake of Christ's body and blood, we are affirming that His blood was shed and His body was sacrificed for our salvation.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said that with His body and blood, He was making a *new* covenant, for the forgiveness of sins. A covenant is an agreement between two parties, each of whom has to keep up their end of the deal. *His* part of that covenant was to go to the cross and die an agonizing death in payment for our sins. *Our* part of that covenant is to believe He did that for us—and be eternally grateful!

With the Jesus Diet—His Sacred Body and Blood—we may not lose any weight. But according to our Lord, we do gain eternal life. So the answer to "Are we saved by partaking of this Sacrament?" is "no," if we eat and drink Christ *without faith*. The answer is "yes," if we commune with faith, because it is our *faith* that has saved us for eternal life, already. If we have faith in Jesus, we'll still go to heaven even if we never receive Communion again. However, partaking of the Real Presence of Christ in Communion is like—and pardon this expression during a time of pandemic—getting a booster shot. We are spiritually vulnerable if we fail to receive an infusion of Jesus at this holy table often.

In the early second century, St. Ignatius, who was Bishop of Antioch, wrote in a letter to the Church at Ephesus that the Eucharist is "the medicine of immortality, and the antidote to prevent us from dying, [which causes us to] live forever in Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Hmm. An antidote to prevent us from eternal death. Sounds like medicine for our souls. On the news, we hear that getting the COVID vaccine "keeps us out of the hospital and out of the morgue." Feeding on Jesus keeps us out of eternal death and hell.

Most of us diet to improve our wellbeing. The Jesus Diet will definitely improve our *spiritual* health. So let us feed on Him intentionally and often, by faith with thanksgiving! Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapt. "Weight Loss Jokes," *Reader's Digest* © 2021 < <https://www.rd.com/jokes/weight-loss-jokes/> > 17 August 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Kuhner, "The Medicine of Immortality," *Evangelization and Catechesis, Diocese of Rochester*, 11 May 2018, <<https://eucharist.ec.dor.org/the-medicine-of-immortality/>> 16 August 2021.