

Feb 13, 2022

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

John 6:35-59

“Bread of Life”

1. In Mexican culture, the notion of “you are what you eat” carries a unique flavor, because we believe there is a deep connection between emotions and food.
 - a. In the magical realism novel “Like Water for Chocolate,” Mexican author Laura Esquivel, describes a scene that gives us a glimpse of that connection
 - b. A young woman in the story sees herself in the impossible situation of having to cook the wedding banquet for the man she secretly loves as he married someone else.
 - c. The young woman can’t let her secret out, yet in a private moment in the kitchen, as she prepared the batter for the wedding cake, some tears run down her cheek, and, unnoticed, mix in with the batter.
 - d. Later, when the guests begin to eat the cake at the wedding banquet, a wave of melancholy washes over all who take a bite. They couldn’t possibly know why they were feeling her sadness in that joyous occasion.
2. In our passage today, it is also sort of a “you are what you eat” message, when Jesus makes explicit (perhaps even grossly so) the emotional connection between eating, believing and becoming.
 - a. There is a theological tradition in the Hebrew scriptures which uses the image of eating/consuming God’s wisdom and prophetic words to mean they really became a part of us (Coloe)
 - i. Even though we are talking about scriptures written in Hebrew, you might have heard of Wisdom referred to as Sophia, which is the Greek translation of that word
 - ii. And the concept of Wisdom/Sophia in the book of Proverbs and other wisdom literature voices the feminine divine
 - iii. In Proverbs 9:5-6, Wisdom / Sophia says: “Come eat of my bread and drink of my wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity and live, and walk in the way of insight.”
 - iv. Then in Sirach 24:19-22, Wisdom / Sophia says: ‘Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits. For the memory of me is sweeter than honey, and the possession of me sweeter than the honeycomb. Those who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more. Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who work with me will not sin.’
 - v. Some who heard Jesus speak about being the bread of life, would have heard Sofia’s voice.
 - vi. Some who couldn’t handle his Wisdom, were grossed out by his message and his ethic to be with the unclean
 - b. Then we of course hear Jesus’ words and we think of the sacrament of communion, because Jesus is offering himself so that if we fully embrace Jesus, we consume his wisdom and Jesus becomes a part of us
 - c. It is a spiritual and emotional kind of eating, of consuming, which can only happen if there is a deep sense of believing in the message

- d. Taking in Jesus' message has a direct impact into who we become, in practical terms to take in his message offers us a new identity, a process of becoming the full humans God intended us to be.
 - e. Following the metaphor, Jesus is saying: God sent me not as a side dish or as one of many options in a buffet, but as the bread of life.
 - i. Consume and take in the fullness of the message I bring,
 - 1. a message of life in the face of death,
 - 2. a message of grace and forgiveness in the face of injustice and marginalization.
 - ii. Jesus says: Join me. Eat this body which is putting itself on the side of the widows and the orphans, which dares to touch the leper to heal them
 - iii. Jesus says: Consume my wisdom, consume my practice of justice, and gain life that is beyond life, joining the eternal nature of God
3. If we are what we eat, then we should also become what we believe
- a. There has been a lot of talk recently about what ideas we consume, specifically, the ideas which are taught in public schools about topics such as the role of slavery in the history of this country, or the presence of structures of white supremacy, or aspects of sexual education (perhaps that which gives context to the disjuncting experience of LGBTQ youth in a world that takes sides and prioritizes against them).
 - b. The argument in bills in our state legislature and 30 some other states oppose transparency and academic honesty and basically say: I don't want my child to consume in school notions of past and present racism, or to feel guilty for the evils of racism inflicted on people of color for generations.
 - c. Let me connect three dots that may not seem connectable.
 - i. In the 1950s, when public schools were supposed to become desegregated by law, there was great opposition to making public schools a place where there would be both black and white students.
 - 1. Many measures were taken by segregationists, including the sudden uptick in the creation of private schools to accommodate those white families who didn't want desegregation, and including changing state funding formulas to create de facto segregated school districts and fund schools unequally.
 - ii. Then when public swimming pools were desegregated, previously "white-only" pools were filled with concrete. No pool for me. No pool for you. No pool for us, because there will never be an "us".
 - iii. And today, under a different tactic, a place which is the bedrock of democracy, the public school, where arguably all of us would find a place, there are efforts now to fill with concrete, as it were, the open spaces where we would have the intermingling of ideas and people, and the discovery of truth, and working through the impact of racism in history and in current events. No education for me. No education for you. Not that education, anyway.
 - d. Our Presbyterian heritage has for centuries proudly championed public education here and around the world, which is why we pay attention to this in the context of our faith, and how our worldview impacts policy.

- e. This is the latest effort in the dismantling of public education for the fear of who our kids might become if they “consume” such radical knowledge of our painfully complex history, and how we have much atoning to do as a people, as a country, to form a more perfect union.
4. Jesus said: I am the bread of life. To consume that spiritual bread of Wisdom, to let the truth of his radical example of love become a part of us, means we become like him. I hope we get to be what we eat.

Wisdom Commentary. John 1-10. Mary L. Coloe. Series editor Barbara E. Reid. OP. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press. 2021. P.161-191.

Reflection Questions

1. Share a memory of food from your childhood which has emotional meaning for you.
2. Jesus says: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Why use this image if it was going to gross them out?
3. If we imitate Jesus, and consume his message, how do we carry that into the community/culture where we live knowing there will be opposition?