

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson
Christ the King Sunday
November 26, 2017

Take, eat, this is my body, given for you. In these simple yet remarkable words, Jesus gives us everything. In our outstretched hands, we receive whatever it is we are lacking in our heart, mind, body, or soul, be it hope, healing, joy, comfort, inspiration, challenge, insight, creativity, strength, or a taste of what is yet to come in our lives. It is a moment which we would talk about as sacramental, meaning that it is an outward expression of inward grace or, in simpler language, it means Jesus is there, in that bread, in that grace of acceptance we feel in our hearts, and in that pull toward our own wholeness, in God's righting what has gone wrong in our lives, Jesus is there.

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus asks us to make every moment sacramental, and tells us how to do this. First is to see Jesus in every moment by looking at the need that is before us. Who is hungry, either for food or for respect and dignity? Who is feeling exposed or naked? Who is being imprisoned by jail cell doors or by poverty or addiction or race? Who is heart-sick and needs the touch of a human hand upon theirs? Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. See my body around you. See me in the need of others.

Jesus then asks us to *be* Jesus in each of those moments, by having the heart of Jesus. That's the point behind receiving communion - that our hearts might be shaped and formed, so only love, whose origin is divine, will flow from us, so we will see the need in others and we will care. As hard as it is to be present to someone in need, whether it be grief or hardship or shame or rejection, we will stand with them as their companion and champion. Take eat, this is my body, which is given for you. Be my body, my heart for others.

Finally, Jesus asks us to *do* for or do to Jesus in each of those moments, by moving from caring to action, by imaging Jesus is each of those people before you, and asking you for help. These instructions aren't merely metaphors, just as Jesus is not a metaphor. Jesus intends for us to actually put the plate of homemade food before the hungry person. Jesus intends for us to make that phone call to the person we know is lonely, or bring that casserole to the family in need, or talk to the person with kindness, even if we can't understand them well due to their foreign accent. Jesus calls us into "Kingdom living," which means seeing and responding to each moment sacramentally, as though Jesus were in the conversation, the interaction, the need. Take, eat, this is my body given for you. Do this for me, for my face is in each of the faces you see.

In Matthew's gospel, today's story is Jesus' last teaching opportunity before he is crucified, so we have to imagine Jesus has saved the most important for last. Jesus is saying to us that our actions matter. We are to be accountable to what Jesus has asked us to do. This really is non-negotiable. You may notice that Jesus' last teaching has nothing to do with orthodoxy, right belief, or how the church is to be structured, but rather, it's all about orthopraxy - walking the

walk, being authentic, making a difference in the world, being accountable for our choices or the choices others make on our behalf. We are living an authentic Christian life when we receive the bread on Sunday and on Sunday afternoon, as we plan our week ahead, we orient our lives to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and welcoming the stranger. Jesus did all of these things, which is why, when we do them, these moments are sacramental. Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you. In receiving the broken bread, we become Christ's body, so that we can see, be, and do for Jesus, so we can be sent out into the world to move it toward justice, where wrongs will be set right, and only God's love will pour from all hearts.

When I was working with the results from the Friday evening exercise at our Diocesan Convention, one person responded to the question, "What is your burning desire?" by saying he wanted to stop doing all the church activities and get out there and feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. I was relieved to see this person wasn't a member here at St. Andrew's, because it said to me that that parish had lost its sense of Jesus' imperative to make a difference in the world by looking around us and meeting the needs of others. Many times, churches can get self-absorbed or focused on activities of the people who come to church all the time, but forget those who are still outside the walls of the church. Jesus' message today is a good reminder that we as individuals and as a parish should always use this as our criterion for making decisions about what to do or how to be or how to spend our money – do our actions meet a physical or spiritual hunger? Do they provide protection for those who feel naked, exposed, or vulnerable? Do they open our hearts so we love as Jesus did, unconditionally and with the desire to heal in every moment? Do they welcome those who may not have felt at home in church before? This is gospel work. Jesus makes that very clear today. This is why two of the promises we make in our baptismal vows are centered on how we make the love of God real to others in concrete ways. We promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being. These promises cover it all. If we live into these two vows, through our choices and actions, we will indeed make each moment sacramental. We will indeed feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, and visit the sick and those in prison. Take, eat, this is my body, given for you.

Our actions matter, for through them, we enter into a knowledge and experience of Jesus, and that is our salvation. You may notice that when you hand someone a plate of food that you have lovingly prepared at the community meal, or listen to their story, or offer to help them get to their doctor's appointment the next day, or when you make someone feel really welcome when they sit next to you in the pew, or when, as our young people did, you meet people of different backgrounds, like we did at the ESL class, or when we created a garden for people imprisoned by domestic violence, that you feel a particular closeness to God. That's Jesus being there. That's what sacramental living, or Kingdom living is all about.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. It is a day when we celebrate a number of attributes of Jesus, but in particular these two: first, Jesus is the Lord of lords, the King of kings, which means Jesus' power is over all of the world. This means that if all is not well, it is not the end. This is

particularly comforting in our world today, when each week it seems there's some new thing to be alarmed by, either here in our country or elsewhere around the world - some natural or human evil released into the world. It's good to know that this is not the end. Jesus will have the last word. Our story from Ezekiel reminds us that, when the Israelites strayed from YH, YH allowed them to stray, permitted them to be oppressed, so they could choose to return. They were never separated from the love of God, who is presented as the metaphor of the Good Shepherd in that story, but they were allowed to wander, living in the wilderness for some time before ultimately being brought back into the fold. This story gives us hope that this will happen to our world also. That, as Desmond Tutu predicted, if we each drop our kindness into a bucket, eventually that bucket will overflow, and goodness will reign. That's God's dream and intention for us. Each time we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the sick and imprisoned, we are adding to the kindness in the bucket and helping God's reign come near. Each time we make these choices, we are acknowledging that Christ is Lord of lords, King of kings, and God's goodness will prevail. Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you – so you can become Jesus in the world.

The second attribute of Jesus we raise up today is that there is judgment involved. That's what kings do, they judge their subjects. If we had believed the stories from our last two Sundays were of the real Kingdom of God, not the fake Kingdom of God others presented, this statement might cause us some consternation. That "king" would have slammed the door on all those unprepared, all those without the appropriate resources, all those who lived in a place of fear or punishment. And if we were honest, we'd acknowledge that we've been in those places ourselves, and we'd be looking at the outside of a closed door. But here's something interesting: those described, those unprepared, those without resources, those who live in fear, sound a lot like the people Jesus is instructing us to care for – those who are hungry, vulnerable, imprisoned by fear or paralyzed by oppression. This is when we realize Jesus is a really different kind of king. Jesus, as the King of kings, cares about justice, cares about everyone, cares about righting the wrong ways of the world. Here's a way this could play out. Jesus as the King of kings, the one who cares about justice, can be good news for the bullies and those bullied. Jesus as the King of kings says that the power of Jesus will work with those who feel the need to prove themselves to be better or stronger than others, by giving voice to his or her victims, which of course has been the whole "#me too" movement, raising voices together to say this isn't the way of the Kingdom, or by being the force behind laws or school rules that make this behavior unacceptable, and by drawing the bullies into a place of healing the deep hurts or rejection that is at the root of this behavior. This is also good news for those bullied, for God will be their companion and champion. Jesus will be with them. And if Jesus is there, then we will be also. Jesus knows what it is like to be bullied and was able to create new life from this violence and aggression. Jesus, through our actions, will do that for those who find themselves in this situation. Take, eat, this is my body, given for you, so you can do this for and to Jesus himself.

We will break bread together shortly and in receiving it, we will be given everything, all that we need to be whole, all that we need to make the world a better place, all that we need to see Jesus in every moment, to be Jesus in every moment, and to do for or to Jesus in every

moment. Our life experiences are our daily bread, as are our times of joy and sorrow, courage and fear, strength and weakness, abundance and scarcity. As we allow Jesus' body to be broken so we may become it, may we also allow Jesus to break open our daily bread, our lives, so that Jesus may come within. Let us allow Jesus to be our Lord of lords, King of kings, acknowledging that his way is our way and the way toward justice in our world. Amen.