

Crucified Jesus is our food and drink

John 6:51–58

Jesus said, ‘whoever eats me will live because of me’ (John 6:57).

If someone said to us on the way here this morning, ‘Where are you going?’, and we said, ‘We’re going to church’, and they asked, ‘What do you do there?’ and we said, ‘We go there to eat a person’—how do you think they’d react?

One of the accusations made against Christians in the early days was that they engaged in some kind of cannibalistic ritual.

We heard Jesus say this morning, ‘whoever eats me will live because of me’.

Feel the strangeness of that statement: ‘whoever eats me will live because of me’.

If it sounds strange to us, then we’re not the only ones. It sounded strange to the Jewish people who first heard Jesus speaking those words: they ‘disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”’ (John 6:52).

We would expect that in answer to that question Jesus would give them a reasonable explanation. But it gets worse. All Jesus said in response to that question was: ‘unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you’ (John 6:53). So now we’ve got not just eating flesh but drinking blood. How gruesome is that?

We get used to hearing certain things in a particular way, and taking them for granted. But to stand back for a moment and listen to what is

being said—what does it sound like to us? And how would it come across to people outside?

Like we are used to seeing a crucifix—a depiction of Jesus hanging on a cross. I knew a man who told me about the first time he ever went into a church building. It was on a school visit when he was a boy in England. There was a stained glass window there showing Jesus on the cross. He ran out of the church screaming, 'If that's what they do to people in there, I'm not staying around!'

It is horrific, when you think about it.

Jesus was not averse to using shock tactics. I think that's what he was doing here when he said, 'whoever eats me will live because of me'. And when he said, 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life'.

Let's try and tease out what he's saying. Have you had breakfast this morning? And are you going to have lunch? And dinner? And maybe a glass of something with it? What would happen if you didn't have anything to eat and drink for a whole week? We wouldn't be in a good state. Leave it long enough, and we'd be dead.

Food and drink keep us going. Food and drink keep us in life. Physically. But, as Jesus said, there's more to life than food and drink, and the immediate things. Jesus said, 'Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?' (Matt. 6:25). What is it that really keeps us going in life, gives us in fullness of life? Is it our work, or our occupation? Is it our home? Is it having lots of stuff, even lots of money? Is it family? Is it some relationships with other people? Is it belonging to church? Are these the things that give us life? All of that might be true—and all of that can run out, and can break down. And where does that leave us?

What will keep us going in a way that lasts, that will never break down? What feeds us and keeps us going in life at the deepest level?

Right through to the end of our lives, and then beyond, and out the other side?

Because that's what Jesus is talking about here. He said later, I have come that you 'may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10). And now he says, 'whoever eats me will live because of me . . . Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have *eternal* life'—life to the full, life that lasts—here and now, in this life, and beyond. Can any of those other things give us that? Jesus is saying, You've got to get that kind of life—from me. Feed on me. Let me be your food and drink. Let me be what keeps you going.

Jesus knew where all his life came from. He knew what kept him going. There's only one source of life. Jesus said, 'I live because of the Father' (John 6:57). That would be true of us, would it not? Did any of us go out and get life for ourselves? How could we, if we weren't even there yet? Does not all life come to us as a gift? From outside ourselves—from God? Jesus said, 'I live because of the Father'. Jesus had said, 'the Father . . . has granted the Son also to have life in himself' (John 5:26). None of us can say we have life in ourselves in that sense—self-sufficiently—all of our life and breath and everything comes to us as a gift from the Giver of life (see Acts 17:25). But the Father has granted the eternal Son 'to have life in himself', so that the Son in turn, with the Father and the life-giving Spirit, can give life to us (see John 5:21). So Jesus here says, 'Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me' (John 6:57). Jesus is saying, I can give you the eternal life that the Father has, that he has given to me to hand on to you, and you're going to have to come to me to get it—you need to feed on me. Jesus has that fullness of life through his relationship with the Father. We can have it in our relationship with Jesus. What kind of relationship is that? Jesus has said earlier, 'Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever *believes* in me will never be thirsty . . . whoever *believes* has eternal life' (John 6:35, 47). So it is a faith-relationship with Jesus—we believe in him. And Jesus will go on to say, 'If you *love* me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). So it is a love-relationship with Jesus.

Being in a faith-love relationship with Jesus, in absolute dependence, is what it means to feed on him, to have our sustenance from him, to have life to the full, and for ever.

Is that where we are? In a faith-love relationship with Jesus as that which keeps us going in life? We have a relatively new Archbishop in the Anglican Church in Adelaide, Geoffrey Smith, and every time he preaches he's always talking about Jesus. It's most refreshing! Rather than church this and church that, it's all about Jesus, and our relationship with Jesus, and what it means to be disciples of Jesus, as absolutely central to being a Christian. I assume that this is why we are all here—because we are in that relationship with Jesus—but is that what we bring through here to each other? And is that what comes through to others outside—'Oh yes, we know those Anglicans—they are the Jesus people! They know God as their Father!'—? 'They know forgiveness and cleansing and healing for all of their sins'—? 'If we want to know the real Jesus, we can ask those people at the Anglican Church!'—?

I have been having a look at the parish website and facebook page, and picking up copies of the leaflets and history of the parish that are near the door, and reading through them to find out a bit about the Anglican Parish of Port Lincoln. To a certain extent I come to those things as an outsider, so I can ask myself, 'What does this convey to someone who is outside the church, and maybe has never had anything much to do with it (which is the majority of people in Port Lincoln)? What does this tell me about who these people are, and what they are on about, and what is most important to them?' It's good to do that sometimes with an outside eye. They tell me bits and pieces about what goes on, and the church buildings. But I'm not sure if Jesus gets much of a mention. Have a look yourselves, and see if I'm right.

Yet I take it that Jesus is important to us, and that the reason we're here and part of the church after all these years is because he has touched our lives somehow in a very real way. We can be a bit shy in talking about it. But I don't see why we should be. And maybe the time

for being shy about it is over now. If Jesus is important to us, and has helped us, why shouldn't we be letting other know, so he can be a help to them?

[Look at the middle window in the sanctuary. Who's that a picture of? It's our Lord Jesus, a week after he rose alive from death—that's pretty impressive—know anyone else who's done that? On the right is John the apostle, who knew Jesus as well as anyone, and told us all about him. And on the left is Thomas, our patron saint, after whom this church is named. What is Thomas saying to Jesus? He is saying, 'My Lord and my God!' Thomas is called the doubter, but we don't celebrate his doubt—we celebrate his faith. At least, I hope we do. And Thomas came up with one of the most profound faith-statements in the whole of the New Testament, when he said to the risen Jesus, 'My Lord and my God!' What did Jesus say to Thomas? 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe'—that's all of us! That's what St Thomas's church is here to represent.] That's what we're here for—a faith-love relationship with Jesus as Lord and God. And that's what we need to be letting others know about.

If there was someone in Port Lincoln who wanted to know who the real Jesus is, would their first port of call be the Anglican parish of Port Lincoln—'They'd be able to tell me!' Maybe that's something we could work on together during the time I am here.

As we present ourselves as a church and as Christians in the community, what are we saying about what is most important to us? Is a central focus feeding on Jesus as our bread and butter, as our life-blood?

Jesus said, 'whoever eats me will live because of me'. Here's another way we could think about that: think about your youngest grandchild, or child or niece or nephew. Ever said, 'You're so gorgeous I could eat you up!' Is it asking too much to think of our relationship with Jesus in that way? Is that what he might be saying?

Sometimes we can be so preoccupied with other things as to miss out on that central relationship with God in Jesus. And the Bible tells us that is true of the whole human race. We have been given the gifts of life and breath and everything, and we have taken those gifts to ourselves as if they came from us, and as if God isn't there. Or as if something else is God. We had a young tradie in doing some work on our bathrooms at home, and he saw the odd crucifix on the wall, and he said, 'Are you religious?' And we said, 'Yes—we're Christians'. And he said, 'Yeah, I believe in God—I'm God!' The Bible says that's what we've all done: we have set ourselves up as our own little gods, living from ourselves and for ourselves. And that ends up as a different kind of feeding frenzy: we use and exploit other people, at their cost, for our own advantage. As a couple of the Psalms say:

those evildoers
... eat up my people as they eat bread,
and do not call upon God (Psa. 53:4; compare 14:4).

The musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* put that interpretation on Jesus at the Last Supper. It has Christ saying: 'For all you care, this wine could be my blood'—that you are guzzling—'For all you care, this bread could be my body'—that you are scoffing down. That's what we end up doing to God and to each other—devouring one another (see Gal. 5:15)—when we turn away from our Giver of life. Ultimately, that is the way of death.

That's why Jesus had to say, 'the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my *flesh*' and 'unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man *and drink his blood*, you have no life in you' (John 6:51, 54). More shock tactics. What is he saying here? What happens when our blood is separated out from our flesh? We die. How does that blood get separated out from flesh? In an act of violence. Jesus was telling his disciples that he was going to suffer a violent death. And that is what happened on the cross. But that he would do it as a gift that brings the world back to life: 'the bread that I will give *for the life of the world* is my flesh'.

What happened in that flesh of Jesus on the cross? Paul the apostle tells us that God on that cross ‘condemned sin in the flesh’ (Rom. 8:3)—in our flesh that he had taken on into himself, the Son of God suffered and bore all the fearful consequences of our sin of turning away from God: all the hurt, the shame, the pain, the defilement, the confusion, the darkness, the total separation from God, and finally the death that is our due—Jesus took all of that into himself, and finished it there. What do we say at the central point of this service? ‘Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world’. And when he takes it away, it’s gone. It’s *gone*. And we stand in him risen from death, guilt-free, and alive. Able to live to the fullness of the life of God, as God’s own love is ‘poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us’ (Rom. 5:5; compare 8:4). Jesus is saying: Feed on me in all of *that*, and you will live.

That’s what we come here to do.