

August 22, 2021

For the past four weeks we have talked about different ways we experience Jesus as nourishment for our souls. Today we finish that series...

Last week I referenced that the gospel reading was shocking. Six times in seven verses we hear Jesus say eat my flesh and drink my blood... It's so graphic that, every time I read it, it literally makes me wince...

In our reading today, some of the people are complaining, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" I completely understand! Jesus then asked them straight up, "Does this offend you?"

The Greek word for this is "scandalon," it literally means scandal or another name for it might be a stumbling block. This is one of those things that's difficult to accept. Either you work with it and let it change you, or you fight it and part ways.

And our text says, "many of the people did turn back..." In other words, many people did reject the teaching and abandoned him.

Today, I'd like to work with this a little bit... What might Jesus mean when he says, "eat my flesh and drink my blood?" Let's be honest, as strange and shocking as it sounds, Jesus is quite serious about it...

And I think the writer of John wants us to wrestle with this... He mentions it six times in just seven verses-- kind of overdoing it! So, what does it mean to devour Jesus?

Well, first of all I have to get past how unpleasantness it is! If I think about it as a metaphor, it's much easier... So, as a metaphor, what would it mean that someone is devoured? Well, first of all, someone is destroyed, and secondly, that person then becomes a source of sustenance.

As we reflect on the story of Jesus, we will remember that he was devoured... He was crucified... It was a death carefully orchestrated by the chief priests, the political establishment and let's not forget all the common people who were there yelling, "crucify him, crucify him".

And every gospel, all four of them, invite us to consider how we would have acted if we had been there. To see ourselves complicit in the death of Jesus; seeing Jesus' blood on our own hands... In other words, I wonder if Jesus says, eat my flesh and drink my blood, intentionally, deliberately, exactly so we can see how we devour others.

Quick story... I was running through my Facebook feed last week when I came across a post showing some pictures of a '75 Gibson Les Paul Custom... Another name for that guitar is the "fret-less wonder." Exactly because the frets are so amazingly smooth and polished.

The guitar was just recently cleaned and set up, and it was absolutely beautiful. Those Customs are usually black, but this one was wine red. I just love that color. There were pictures of the head stock, the neck, the body, absolutely everything was in pristine/original condition.

The owner even had the original documents in the case, all the little stickers and hangers. In the guitar collecting world, that's known as case candy...

The person who posted the pictures mentioned that it might be for sale if he could get the right price... So, I kept reading... And shock of all shocks, I knew the person! And that's not good, because I was suddenly thinking bad things...

Suddenly in my brain, I concocted a whole scenario about how he would taunt people with it, but that there would never be enough money in the world for him to actually sell it. In my little brain, I thought, "Sure, he's just wants to show it off!" I admit, in my jealousy, I wasn't so loving, kind or gracious...

See what's going on here? Just basic coveting... It leads to all sorts of rivalry and icky feelings and judgments... And can you see how fast it happens? In a blink of an eye, I had judged this guy mercilessly...

I like to think I'm above those petty little judgments, but obviously I'm not. Because of my jealousy, I started to take a small bite out of someone. Someone I barely knew. Truth is, that covetousness, jealousy, all that garbage just leads to more and more devouring of one another...

If there's one thing, I've learned from reading the bible, it's that human beings are very good at judging, blaming, criticizing, condemning, accusing, finger pointing, stoning, crucifying... And not only are we good at these things, we're also blind about our participation in these things.

And it is exactly this blindness that is the problem. We devour each other with our words all the time, and we keep ourselves in the dark about it. Exactly because it's just plain hard for us to admit. We don't like to think of ourselves that way!

Jesus tells his disciples, "eat my flesh and drink my blood." Jesus will be devoured. He will be betrayed, accused and killed... Jesus explains this to his disciples over and over again. And the disciples have a hard time understanding this—they don't seem to get it; they just can't see it!

They complain, "This teaching is difficult." And it is... So, what is the sustenance, what is the nourishment that comes from devouring Jesus?

Well, I wonder if it has to do with opening our eyes. You see, Jesus is devoured *exactly* by our murderous tendencies, *exactly* so we can see ourselves in a mirror...

It's about seeing our own hurtful tendencies. It's about seeing how I, personally contribute to the evil of harming others.

And when we can see how our judgments and words devour and destroy, repentance happens... Words of judgment are replaced with words of peace and

kindness. You see it's a fundamental transformation of the heart; a completely different way of being in the world. And for the sake of the world!

And the good news today is that Jesus came to lead us into this transformation, a way of eternal life... Through Jesus, God has welcomed all of us into a new and different kind of kingdom. A kingdom where devouring is replaced with forgiveness and love...

Jesus is indeed the bread of life, nourishment for all.

Amen.