

Sermon 11th Sunday after Trinity year B 2015

For the last couple of weeks our Gospel reading has been from John and we have been hearing of Jesus' teaching about bread and wine. Taken literally they are difficult to understand and are one of the causes of division amongst different denominations.

The Jewish people that Jesus spoke to were sensitive about food issues. Their God was very interested in food. Right from the start when an apple caused their separation from God, through feeding them in the wilderness when they were about to starve and the sending of food to certain of his servants like Elijah the Tishbite. And then of course there were their taboos and rituals and even their Passover meal which showed them as a people set aside as God's chosen people these all contributed to the importance of food and God.

Jesus' teaching stirred up a lot of strong feelings. His eating habits had already got him into trouble. He wasn't choosy about who he ate and drank with, he certainly wasn't an

ascetic like John the Baptist and his disciples picked grain to eat on the Sabbath. As we are reading these words with the knowledge of the Eucharist, it is very difficult to put ourselves in the context of those first Jews hearing this words which sounds like cannibalism. No wonder some of his followers left him and his enemies gathered more ammunition. They were strong, shocking statements.

Humans are often obsessed with food, whether we can get enough to eat, how much or how little we eat, when are we eating next, where it comes from, how it is grown, does it fit in with our ideals, is it fashionable, are all the food groups included etc etc? What I believe we are being asked to do here, in these readings, is to make Jesus our obsession.

As his followers found we can't pick and choose the bits of his teaching that suit us and our life style, we are challenged to grow more and more into his likeness, to follow his teachings and see the Father through him. Our love of God needs to be central to our lives, it is our relationship

with the triune God which should fill our lives not food or thoughts about food.

The Eucharist is symbolic of our relationship with God. It shows our intimacy, that we have taken him into our lives, into our very being. Food nourishes every cell of our body, is required for growth, repair and energy, fluid and food are essential for life; this is the illustration we are following. God is in our very core, he is central to our well-being, God is the source of life.

For us the challenge is to lead a life that is full of God not full of worldly things. To carry through into our everyday lives the intimacy that we find at God's table, sharing a family meal with him and each other. We are asked to choose eternal life or the short term gratification of earthly pleasures. But Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, reminds us that life with God at its centre needn't be dull or miserable, we should sing and give thanks and be filled with the Spirit. The Spirit can lead us on many an adventure and fill us with joy.

Therefore, as we approach the culmination of this service and meet God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit at his table, let us pray that we can absorb God more into our lives, into our very being so that we may be ones who eat of the living bread and so have eternal life.