

## Abiding in the Bread of Life

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

This coming Sunday Jesus tells us, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

Jesus’ words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood can sound like something out of a modern-day horror film. Sometimes my ears allow me to hear these words as they could sound to others and I understand how those unfamiliar with the context could be shaken by the sound of them. But Jesus’ strange words about flesh and blood actually give us the clue to his real meaning. He tells us that when we eat of his flesh and drink of his blood, then we abide in him, and he in us. So, what does it mean to abide in him? In short, it is how we truly join our lives to his in a way that allows us to see the world differently. To abide in him means to see the world through God’s eyes and know we are forever changed in light of this new vision. This is when we choose life over death and connection over division. Think of this: have you ever loved anyone so much that when you hugged them in a moment of closeness you just lost track of where they ended and you began; when you just poured yourself out as much as you could to let more of the other in? This is what it feels like to abide in someone. I know I always felt like that the first time I held any of my newborn nieces and nephews. The sweetness of their new life, seemingly fresh off the breath of God, just pierced my heart and I wanted to hold them and protect them from anything that might ever harm them. This, Jesus tells us, is how we face the challenges of this world. This is how we face our fears and live through our controversies. We abide in him. This is how we turn over to God whatever it is that we fear the most trusting that we are loved. We pour ourselves out in order that Christ can more readily fill us. We begin to listen to his life-giving words and we come to believe in the power of his mercy and forgiveness. We grow so close to him that we don’t know where Jesus’ life ends and we begin. When we step out in belief and surrender to God’s love for all, we find ourselves responding to others out of mercy, compassion and forgiveness in the place of anger, frustration and fear. And, we can do this because the best part of us has become intertwined with Christ’s love. This is how we live and grow together in the face of whatever conflict or controversy shakes our world, our church, our community, or our personal lives. When we are faced with the troubles of our own present time, we will do well to step away from the fear and panic that is often our first response and look at the bigger picture. When we take a moment to look back we see that in fact much of what we think is unique to our own time and experience is simply another iteration of the ongoing human experience. I suppose it is the nature of every current generation to think the times in which we live are the definitive times that mark some great turning point. But in fact, every generation of humanity’s unfolding story is filled with amazingly wonderful advances and ideas as well as unspeakable cruelties and desecrations. We’ve always taken 3 steps forward and 2 steps back. So much of what we see and worry about as “the worst ever” this or that simply is not new. Now does that mean we should just become complacent or cynical or live in denial that the world can be a tumultuous and sometimes frightening place? Absolutely not! As a people who love God and follow Jesus, we have been offered a new vision; a new way to be in the world. What we are called to do day in and day out, generation after generation, is to remember that the love of God is greater and stronger and more absolute than the multitude of ways we seek to destroy ourselves and to destroy one another over senseless divisions and fears. We are called to act! In our own time we are called as the new disciples to share in this healing and reconciling love. We are called to love and transform this world that still rejects the notion that God’s grace and love is given for all of humanity. We can always choose violence and divisiveness or we can choose mercy and grace; one leads to death and the other to eternal life. When we abide in Christ, when we eat of his flesh and drink of blood, when we share his risen life this deeply, then we can do none other than love the world in spite of the way it falls so very short of God’s wish for

it. We feel compelled to put our fears aside and love one another across whatever issue divides us. We find the courage to face down hate and insist that God's love always wins. Eat the bread that gives life, abide in the mystery and joy of Christ. Grace and Peace, Stephanie+