

Kimberly O'Brien: John 6:51-58

When my kids were young and I was home with them  
there was a period of time when I baked all of our bread

Yeast bread is not difficult to make

It requires just a few staple ingredients

But it does take time

It is a process that requires revisiting the dough many times

It is a process that cannot be rushed

It is a process that is dependent upon the temperature of the room

It is a process that is physical

When beginning yeast bread, the yeast must be activated

Yeast is an incredible thing

If the water is too hot you can kill it,

too cold it will remain dormant

Once the flour and other ingredients are added, the dough must be kneaded

This was always one of my favorite parts of bread making

Really using the muscles in my hands, arms and shoulders

Massaging the ingredients together into a satiny, firm, dough \ \

Kneading requires strength and purpose

Integrating all of the parts into the dough

Then the dough must rise in a warm place, around 100 degrees farenheight

It has to sit, rest, and grow in this place

Then, for most recipes, you punch the dough down . . .

All of that rising and growth,

Was gone in an instant with a few pounds of my fist

But the yeast is incredible

It raises the dough once again, growing and rising

When the dough is finally ready to bake, there is no smell quite like fresh baked bread

The warm, grainy smell filled my nostrils, bringing me warmth, fullness and satisfaction

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Jesus continues his discourse on the bread of life in the Gospel of John this week

We are quite familiar with this use of words

Words like “eat my flesh” and “drink my blood” are common in Christian communities as we regularly celebrate the Lord’s Supper

But to these people, these words were disturbing

The Jewish people abided by strict dietary codes

These words from Jesus would sound abhorrent

Yet we know that Jesus doesn’t often speak literally

He most often speaks in parable and metaphor

So while we hear clear connections to the Lord's Supper in Jesus' words today, this Gospel is really a bit more complicated than that

The Greek word that is translated as "eat" can also be interpreted as "chew on"

We often use a similar idiom, "chew on this"

to mean not literally to eat something

but to process it thoughtfully

Interpreting Jesus' words in this way we hear:

Unless you chew on who I am and how I live

You have no true life within you

Those who really chew on my teaching will have a meaningful life

I will uplift them

I am true

Those who chew on my ways allow me to dwell deep within them

And they dwell deep within me

This indwelling is not only with me and them, but also with God

Because God sent me

So chew on this

And find meaningful life

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The people Jesus spoke to were familiar with the process of making bread

Bread is an ordinary thing that they could relate to

Making bread isn't difficult

But it is a process that requires time

A process that calls you back again and again

A process that invites you to be aware of what's happening around you

A process that involves your whole self

Chew on this

Dwelling in God and accepting God's indwelling in us is a process

Like yeast that causes the bread to grow and rise

Indwelling requires warmth and nurture

Indwelling requires rest and patience

Chew on this

Sometimes we get punched down

Deflated

Yet God's indwelling within us causes us to rise once again

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And what about drinking Jesus' blood?

He instructs the people to drink his blood 4 times within these 7 verses

Bloodlines were a significant and critical life force in ancient times

Bloodlines ensured survival and success

This ideology of ancestry and heritage persists today

Throughout the bible we hear stories of stress and division over blood lines

Abraham and Sarah fretted over their inability to produce an heir

Jacob tricked his father, Isaac into blessing him with the family inheritance over his older brother Esau

Newly widowed, Ruth went to great lengths to secure a future for herself and her mother-in-law

Continuing one's blood line through heirs was essential to survival

And here Jesus is challenging this ancient foundation of family and society

He declares that his blood is available to all people

His blood brings meaningful life to everyone

This Holy blood runs through the veins of all humankind

Stress and division over blood line end when we are all one in Jesus' blood

Everyone is welcome, cared for, and included when we accept unity in Christ

This redefinition of family in Jesus' blood has special meaning to me

It strips away what I have learned from culture, society –

- And even from my own blood-relatives -

About who is family to me

This Holy blood has broken open my heart

And persists in flowing throughout my entire being

In a way that leaves me no doubt of the interconnectedness we share with others

In a way that gives me no choice

But to be broken open and shared

By Jesus' holy definition of family \ \

All together, through flesh and blood,

Jesus is inviting us to embody God,

By living like Jesus

To allow God to fill our flesh and course through our veins

To be united through God

Made whole,

And to receive unimaginable experiences in life and love

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We're given a lot to chew on in today's Gospel reading

Jesus is challenging and inviting us to grow and change

Jesus is reminding us that Christ abides within us –

and within all others

Jesus knows that living this way is a process, it takes time

It's difficult to overcome rigid thinking and barriers

that have been perpetuated in society for thousands of years

So, as you go about your week

Chew on this

What process of change is God raising within you?

Feel the pulse of Holy blood coursing through your veins

Embody Jesus the Christ in your everyday life

God is calling you

Rise up

Rise up and follow Jesus

Rise up and unite in God's Holy blood

Rise up and live fully into this gift

Amen