

SERMON: 19 August 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper

**“So that all might live”
(Psalm 34:9-14, John 6:51-58)**

I've been really struck by that verse this week - “The living Bread I give you is my body, which I will offer as a sacrifice **so that all may live**” (6:51).

And as I've reflected on this verse I've felt a growing realisation that Jesus **gave out** his life, poured out his life, so that, others might **have** life, or come to life, or be made alive. The Greek literally means Jesus gives out his life, on behalf of the cosmos, the world, in order to procure life for all of humankind.

“Whatever happens, keep living your lives based on the reality of the gospel of Christ, which reveals him to others.” (Philippians 1:27)

So that all may live. So that all may **have life**.

So once people have **seen** this life in others how then do they get it inside them?

In this passage in John's Gospel there's a strange way of Jesus explaining **how** to get this life inside you! He tells those who are listening, that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood.

He says, “Listen to this eternal truth: Unless you eat the body of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have eternal life. Eternal life comes to the one who eats my body and drinks my blood” (6:53-4).

No wonder that in the early years of people following the Way of Jesus, they faced such a hard time from, not just the Jews but from those of other or no faith, including the Romans. They thought these Christians were being barbaric or acting like cannibals because rumours were going around that these Christians were literally eating human flesh and drinking human blood.

In the Torah, the Jewish law given to Moses, it was forbidden to eat or drink the blood of animals. There was a belief that if you did that you would take on the characteristics of that animal. You would become like the animal.

So, is this another example of Jesus, messing with people's theology? Does he want his hearers to eat his flesh and drink his blood, **so that they will indeed**, take on his characteristics, and become like him?

I'll leave that as a rhetorical question but I think the answer is, yes, and more than that. He not only wants his hearers, his followers, to become like him. He wants them to be one with him. And so that what we do and say will be what he would do and say. And as he lived a life of self-giving love, so would we. It's as if he was acting within us and through us, and we were acting within him and through him.

Jesus says something like this when he says in verse 56, "The one who eats my body and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him" (6:54).

He's using language to describe that the relationship he intends between his followers and himself is exactly the same relationship he has with the Father; where the two are so intimate, that they have become one, sharing the same life.

You can see why the sacrament of the Lord's Supper has been so critical to the church. Some parts of the church have literally believed that to take the physical elements of bread and wine mean that they physically become the life of Christ within whoever eats and drinks. Other parts of the church, our own included, have understood this on more of a spiritual level, that we eat and drink it in faith, or by faith. The early reformers like Calvin and John Knox described the taking of the bread and wine, along with the sacrament of baptism, as a means of grace, an opportunity for God's provision, God's hand, to be seen in us humans.

And even if we usually think of it just in spiritual terms, because his life in us shapes us, it does also have a physical effect. One of the Proverbs says that a crushed spirit dries up the bones. For example, when we are depressed, we can crawl into our shell or feel lethargic, and stop exercising. Our physical health can suffer when our spirit is down.

But thanks be to God who has filled us with every spiritual blessing, who has filled us to overflowing with his comforting love (Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 2:1).

God can satisfy our deep hunger and he does it through Jesus the Anointed One, who becomes our life.

A wee word about consumption. If we eat too much we can get bloated. Its not good to eat too much without walking it off. The food we've taken is to give us energy to live, to move, to walk, to serve, to love, to share.

Its a principle of the kingdom of God that as he pours life into us, its only when we let it out again, in loving service, that we find Christ, the Spirit of God fills us up again. Jesus, the Living Bread, is given to us, to share, to be put to good use.

I love how Jesus takes such a basic commodity like Bread to liken himself to. Of course, it alludes to the manna in the desert, but in every generation its an essential ingredient for life, as is water, so its no surprise he calls himself Living Water too.

A wee word about different flavours. Bread can be found in many different varieties or flavours. Some like white, some brown, some with seeds, some without. And I think Jesus, the Living Bread, comes to us in different flavours. For example, there is the bread of forgiveness, the bread of commitment, the bread of wisdom, the bread of compassion.... (examples of each of these).

It might be 2am and you can't sleep but you can still be being fed Living Bread. As the Psalmist declares, even at night my heart instructs me (16:7). It's often at night time when I feel that the Spirit of God feeds me nuggets that I'm going to need the next day, words to say to someone, thoughts to think about a situation, ways to act.

And I think God wants us to remember that its all about so that all may live. As the Living Bread he's always working to bring life in us and through us, with others and for others. I wonder where next and who next, might he be looking to feed in you and through you.

His bread always satisfies, always brings life. Glory be to him, now and always.