

Sermon for Year B Proper 15
August 20, 2006
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock, NC
The Rev. Jeanne Finan

FEED ME! I'M HUNGRY!

It was years ago.

I remember our children were quite young.

I don't remember the name or the location
of the particular zoo we were visiting.

(You visit a lot of zoos when your children are young—
at least, we certainly did!!)

What I do remember

are the motion-activated garbage cans.

They were painted to look like various zoo animals with big mouths.

When you walked by the garbage can

you would hear an appropriate animal noise--

like a lion roar or monkey chatter or hyena laughter,

and then you would hear a voice booming out—

“FEED ME! I'M HUNGRY!!”

Obviously, the staff of the zoo was intent

on keeping the zoo clean and litter free,

so they took this light hearted and attention grabbing approach

to get people of all ages to use the garbage cans,

rather than toss their trash on the ground.

FEED ME! I'M HUNGRY!

One thing we hear in John's gospel this morning

is the awareness Jesus has of our hunger.

It is as if Jesus is trying to explain to us

what we need

to really be fed, to be full.

...the one who eats this bread will live forever.

Wow!

That is indeed a promise that gets our attention.

And in today's gospel,

Jesus is all about getting our attention.

...eat my flesh and drink my blood...

Those words are a bit shocking—
certainly they were to Jesus' disciples,
and if we take the time to think about those words--
I think they are still shocking.

Eating flesh, drinking blood.
(Obviously Jesus did not use a marketing and public relations firm.
I think they might have advised against that metaphor.
You know, Jesus, I think we might need to clean this up a little bit..
Flesh? Blood? Uhhhhh...)

Actually if we look at the Greek words that have been translated “eat” and “drink”,
we discover there has already been a little cleaning up—
for a more accurate translation
would be “gnaw” or “chew on”
or “gulp”--

Gnaw on my body, chew on my flesh, gulp down my blood.
A little more graphic than the simple words *eat and drink*,
the words that make it into our translations today.

But really, *gnaw* is what Jesus wants us to know.
Really gnaw on who I am and why I am here among you is what Jesus is telling us.
Take my flesh and make it your flesh.
One body.
Gulp down my blood as if you will never drink again.
Make it yours.

Consume me.
Fill yourself with me.
Fill yourself with God.

This is not about a polite and superficial sip and nibble.
Jesus calls us to full and total communion--
to come into intimate union
with the very Being of God.

In the Episcopal church, you do not have to wait to be a certain age to take communion.
That is left up to a child's parents.
(Or if one is of the age of no longer needing the approval of one's parents--
the decision to come forward and receive communion is up to you.)

We had a wonderful children's class this spring about the meaning of the Eucharist,
taught by Rick.
And there were children whose parents had chosen to have them wait
to an age the parents felt their child would more fully understand
the meaning of communion.

And there were children whose parents chose to have them receive communion
the minute they were old enough to open their little mouths
or reach out their tiny hands.

And they all gathered together
to learn more about this holy mystery.

And regardless of our age, it will always be a mystery,
because in some ways it makes no sense.
or at least no sense that we can rationally explain.

Bread and wine transformed into body and blood.

What do we believe?

We believe that God is very present, very real
in the bread and the wine offered,
in the body and blood received.

We make the decision when we are ready to receive that presence.

When our longing for God can no longer be denied.

Everything else in our life may be crumbling,
but there is always one place where our emptiness can be filled.

We can't wait for total revelation and understanding.

In fact, the words we hear in Proverbs this morning

might well serve as our guidelines for when we can show up at God's table--

You that are simple, turn in here!

To those without sense...

Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

We don't earn our welcome at God's table.

We don't have to make a certain score on a holy SAT

or get an "excellent" on some sacred performance review.

We have to show up and come forward,

reach out our hands and open our hearts.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Holy gifts for holy people.

That's you—and me.

Our names are already on the guest list.

They've been there for a long, long time.

We do have to say yes.

We do have to say okay, I am ready.

(Or okay, I'm not ready, but okay anyway).

Ready to receive
even though we will never totally understand
the mystery of this bread and this wine.

Eternal life.
That is what Jesus promises.
I really do not know what Jesus means by that.
But I know there is something about this bread and this wine
that transforms me each week.
And I keep coming back--
not because I am a priest.
But because of my deep hunger and longing for God,
Because of our **shared** hunger.

When our daughter lived in San Francisco,
She attended the parish St. Gregory of Nyssa.
She shared the story of a little boy who came up beside her
One Sunday morning at the communion rail to the communion rail
And after he ate his piece of broken bread
and took his sip of wine.
He remained at the rail, and reached up his hands again as the priest went by,
and said,
Oh please.
May I have just a little more Jesus?

Oh please.
Maybe that is what draws me, draws us, here each week
May we have just a little more Jesus?
Might we have just one more taste of the bread that lives forever.
Might we eat and drink of the gifts of God
so that if only for this moment
we feel full
and whole and totally loved
and accepted for whom we really are.

Isn't it amazing how this broken bread makes us feel so unbroken?

And that is a gift.
And that is holy.
And that is the human Jesus
understanding what it is
to really be hungry.

Feed me, I'm hungry.
Please.
Just a little more Jesus.
Please.