

Sermon: Pentecost 12

The Rev. Mike Wernick

August 16, 2015

Year B

Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

In 1819... John Polidori published The Vampyre ... the 19th century's most influential vampire story... but it was Bram Stoker's Dracula in 1897... with all of its scandalous Victorian sensuality... that's more familiar and well remembered... and it's this second novel that serves as the basis for the modern legend... and when it was made into a movie... and premiered in 1931 at the Roxy Theatre in NYC... Bela Lugosi put a face to that legend... and caused some theatre goers to faint in shock at the horror on screen...

Seventy-seven years later... a different Bella... fell in love with a different vampire named Edward... and the five-installment Twilight saga began... a modern... and even more romantic and sensual... special effects extravaganza... about blood... feedings... and timeless love...

For the last several weeks... the Gospel has been talking to us about bread... and how Jesus feeds people... about how the bread he offers... is different from the manna in the wilderness that God gave... that the bread he offers is living bread that's come down from heaven... and whoever eats it will live forever... the first verse in today's Gospel is the last verse in last week's Gospel... this repetition... this emphasis... lets us know that what Jesus is telling us... is important... and there's even something more about bread next week...

But this bread is also Wisdom... it is maturity... Wisdom says: Come... eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed... lay aside immaturity and live... and walk in the way of insight... this is the Law written on our hearts... it's the indwelling light of God... so that what we know... we know from the inside... intuitively...

It can be difficult for us to get past Jesus' words... and the images they invoke... of drinking blood... and eating flesh... of vampires... and zombies... but we have to remember the ancient attitude towards blood... God. Owned. Blood. And blood was life... and blood belonged in its place... and nowhere else... this informed some of the ancient dietary laws... and some of the more modern kosher ones...

But Jesus isn't talking about simply eating food... when the Jews say: *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*... the Greek word that's used is *fah-gain*... which just means to eat... but when Jesus says: *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me*... the Greek word that's used is *tro-go*... which also means eating... but with the added idea of corrosion or wear... the idea of crunching and gnawing... it conveys a much more complete image of getting out of it all that one can... leaving no sinew or tendon left behind... I mean... when we're talking about eternal life... don't we want to make sure we get all the meat we can...

And this passage is similar to what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well... *Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again... but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.* This passage is similar to what Jesus said to Nicodemus... *I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*

And there's another significant difference here... when we eat regular food... it becomes part of us... *you are what you eat*... but like those who ate manna in the wilderness... the body still declines and we still die... but when we eat spiritual food... *we become part of it*... we are drawn into a more expansive reality... we become part of eternal life... a truth that's bigger than we are... so when we metaphorically eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood... we eat spiritual food... and increasingly assimilate his inner essence... his boundless consciousness...

And here's how we know it's working... when we put gas in our car... we can drive it for several hundred miles... but what would happen if we put gas in our car... and put gas in our car... and maybe did it one more time... and it went no where... there'd be something wrong with the gas pump or the car... we wouldn't be getting what we expected... and when we come to the communion table week after week... and are fed once and again with the inner essence of Christ consciousness... with new resurrection life that's available to us in each and every moment... we are able to heal past wounds... forgive past hurts... let go of the past a little bit more each day... and embrace the possibilities of the future a little bit more each day...

When we come to the communion table... and are fed with Mystery... we take on more boundlessness and let go more of boundaries... at least the ones that keep us stuck where we are... the ones that keep us from living into the abundant life that Jesus brings...

And again... in today's reading from Proverbs... Wisdom has built her house... has prepared a meal and set the Table... and invites us in... we are those whom Wisdom invites in...

But remember... Jesus said... *in my Father's House there are many mansions*... and we tend to think... that one day we will inhabit those mansions... that we will be in them... but maybe we ourselves... our bodies and souls... are the mansions which inhabit God's house... maybe we too are the houses which Wisdom has built... the mansions in which God may also dwell...

In the New Zealand Prayer Book... the *Night Prayer* laments... Spirit of God... we forget that we are your home... dwell in us... but God will not be... and Wisdom will not be... uninvited guests...

I came across this passage by Jack Kornfield just this week... and it reminds me of what happens when Wisdom is not invited in... and is left standing at the door... reminds me of what's happening in the world today... *At times the injustice and sorrow of the world seem overwhelming, beyond our capacity to face. Yet something in us knows that this, too, is part of spiritual life and that we can respond to all suffering as part of our own, which in fact it is. None of us can avoid tyranny, loss, sorrow, or death. We are all interconnected in the destruction or saving of our planet.*

We must remember that the world's current problems are fundamentally a spiritual crisis, created by the limited vision of human beings--a loss of a sense of connection to one another, a loss of community and, most, deeply a loss of connection to our deepest spiritual values.

Albert Einstein called us nuclear giants and ethical infants. Only when we have found a compassion, a goodness, and an understanding that transcends our own greed, hatred and delusion, can we bring freedom alive in the world around us. A wide and open heart gives us the strength to face the world directly, to understand the roots of our sorrows and our part in them.

And Dwight Eisenhower reminded us of this responsibility when he said: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all... and in its true sense it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.

Did you know that in vampire lore... a vampire must wait at your door... at the threshold of your home... until they are invited in... and their interminable waiting... the insatiable hunger that they have for blood... is just an expression of the insatiable hunger we have for the life of God... and the timeless love between characters like Bella and Edward...

is just an expression of the timeless love we have for God... but this hunger is only... and very dimly reflected... by Hollywood and its computer generated imagery... because the God of the Eucharist hungers for our love too... waits for us to extend the invitation across the threshold of our souls...

And so Wisdom invites us into her home... to taste her bread and wine... and Wisdom waits... until we invite her into our homes... into our mansions... so we too can be filled to overflowing with insight... and the God of the Eucharist... invites us to this Table again and again... deems us worthy over and over again... deems us worthy to be fed here... to be loved... and forgiven... and loved and forgiven... and waits until we invite Christ into our lives... waits through our doubts... and uncertainties... waits through our hubris and our humility... waits through our chatter and questions... and waits through our silence... until we experience God abiding in us... and us abiding in God... until we experience that we are One. And when we have this experience... when that light finally dawns... when we have the abundant life we were created to have... we realize that we were One all along...

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