

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

And here we are again, yet another Sunday with our gospel reading continuing from the week before. This is four weeks in a row...and the progression keeps building.

But, this Sunday's gospel reading brings it all home.

It is Crunch Time with a capital "C". In the language of sports analogies, think of it as coming to the plate in the bottom of the ninth, trailing by four runs, with two out and the bases loaded. Or you are taking the snap from center with five seconds to go in the game and it is fourth and one at the goal line.

Right now, we are where the rubber meets the road, covered with black ice. You are Gary Cooper heading out into the street at High Noon. Or Cinderella, and the clock is striking twelve midnight.

Whatever turn of phrase that you want to use that most clearly describes the high point of our journey with Jesus. Because he has now painted each of us into a corner. It is crunch time, folks. With a capital "C".

Today's reading is about the very essence, the very foundation of who Jesus understood himself to be in St. John's language as the Son of Man. And it also means that today, we each need to consider, and understand, the very center...the very core...of our expression of faith.

And it is an expression of faith. Faith is the operative word. We are not talking about facts and figures here. The mystery of God...revealed to us through the person who walked among us 2000 years ago...is not empirical. The revelation of God through Jesus is also not logical, or calculable, or measurable, or manageable. It is inconceivable by mankind. There is no way to comprehend the mystery of God.

Why? Because, on this key day of revelation from Jesus, they...and we...hear that it is NOT about comprehension, or understanding, or empirical. Not at all

I am struck that Jesus does not give the crowd in the wilderness (what for us is) a four-Sunday discourse on the Bread of Life until AFTER they have eaten their fill of the loaves and fishes. Jesus did not make the five thousand sit down on the grass and give them a lecture so that they understood before he "took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted". It almost seems that, if Jesus had not fed the large crowd, he would not have much to say.

And in these verses where Jesus picks up on the feeding by speaking of giving his flesh to eat, his concern is less with getting his hearers to understand as getting them to just eat.

He tells his hearers of their absolute need to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of

Humanity. “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day” The words “flesh” and “blood” point to the cross, where Jesus’ flesh will be broken and his blood will be spilled, Jesus associates the separation of his flesh and blood in his violent death on the cross as the moment when Jesus will totally give his whole self for the life of the world.

There is a shift in the Greek text from the more polite verb “to eat” to a verb that suggests the physical crunching with the teeth, all that accentuates that Jesus intends a real experience of eating. Hints of the Eucharist find their way into his words. For us, who will come to the table, the connection is unavoidable. As we eat the bread and drink the cup, we participate in the promise that Jesus fulfilled on the cross, and it seems we also participate in the violence by which that promise was fulfilled -- crunching with our teeth.

In the real action of eating, we begin to feel the real differences, and focus on the way that Jesus promises, instead of instructs or explains. “Promises made”, are what? Promises we make from one to another are on a different plane of intimacy, of emotional investment, than the relatively more-isolated relationship surrounding mere instruction or explanation. Instruction or explanation involve function of the mind. More binary in nature. While promises dive deeper, into the heart.

So, Jesus PROMISES what? That whoever eats and drinks of him has eternal life now and will be raised up on the last day. PROMISES to provide food for the life of the world, his flesh and blood. PROMISES to nourish the world with the gift of himself...life-giving food for us and for the world. Nourishes faith, forgives sin, and empowers us to be witnesses to the Gospel.

All throughout John Chapter 6, Jesus has tried to help us embrace that God’s wisdom -- to steal a word from Proverbs -- is not so much knowledge to be explained and understood as it is relationship to be trusted and embraced. Jesus no longer speaks of “belief in,” as we find in chapter 3, but of “the one who eats me”. Eternal life does not come through understanding correctly or believing the right things, but eternal life is being in close communion with Jesus. Eternal life is to remain in Jesus and to have Jesus remain in us. We take Christ’s body and blood into our mouths, into our stomachs, into our bodies, so that Christ remains in us and we remain in Christ. As we eat and drink, Christ moves us closer to himself, and he moves us closer to the very life of God. Christ moves us closer to himself, so close that we are as intimate with Jesus as the Father is with the Son.

The bread and wine. Made from God’s creation. Offered back to God, and blessed and consecrated by God. Through bread and wine the mystery of God begins to be revealed to us.

I am not a life-long Episcopalian....received into this denomination in the year 2000. Before that, my experience within an active church life did not parallel this liturgy. If I had been worshipping in the Roman Catholic tradition, for example, I would have been more familiar with how we celebrate

and worship here...but that was not my experience.

But now, many of you have heard me share that the high point of my week is in the gathering with others...right here, around the table behind me. Praying together in celebration before God, with thanksgiving for all of life's blessings. And giving thanks through the simple, but indescribable joy of sharing this bread and this wine. And the good, and faithful, and thankful people of God come forward here, to gather at this table, week after week...generation after generation. Not minding the heat of summer, and braving the ice and snow of winter.

I witness all of this, and it gives my heart real joy...to praise God with you. And I cannot tell you why, or how, I feel this way...that, after all, is part of the mystery of it. Perhaps this is how it is supposed to be...and that would make sense, given the conversation that Jesus has in today's gospel reading.

He lays it on the line. In building from the weeks-ago telling again of the witnessing of the miracle of feeding the five thousand, he now focuses the laser beam upon himself...but not for himself. Living bread come down from heaven.

Obviously, there was confusion among his listeners, who openly question how Jesus can give his flesh for others to eat. That is a good question, if he was heard literally. But, now the mystery becomes clearer....and it is clearer because it is NOT going to be definable, or quantifiable, but rather because it IS all about the heart. About commitment to a loving relationship...to flesh and blood, no matter what happens.

Jesus is the spiritual connection to the living God. Everything that we have read about him...everything said to be promised to us...everything that we could and should know about this life, at this time...cannot be done...cannot happen...cannot exist without him. All of scripture that we proclaim as holy, tracing the history of the faith journey of a nation up to this point...and all the remaining scriptural testimony that follows this point, including the faith of the church continued for 2000 years...all of it...all point to this. Flesh and Blood.

Over these last weeks, we have witnessed the long discourse on the Bread of Life in St. John's gospel finally reaching the Eucharist, where we move from bread, as such, to the flesh and blood of the Son of Man.

We are thrust into the whole relativity of human life. Into the life where men and women are not God. Where their ideas and notions are not the absolute Truth of God. Where, at best, men speak in parables. Where their actions are not the righteousness of God. Where, in fact, life does pass to death.

And it is into this realm of death that Jesus passes with his eyes wide open, with singular purpose, and into this realm he draws his disciples with him.

Crunch time with that capital "C". Gary Cooper's High Noon. Cinderella's stroke of

midnight. A **very** big grain of sand passing through that hour glass.

As for me, it is...and will always be...part of the mystery that we cannot know for certain until we move from this world. And, as for me, I am more concerned about the now...because God has given me much to do. It is enough for my spirit in my journey with God at this point that I continue to dwell in this house of the Lord. That God, through Jesus, as the Christ and my Lord, continues to feed me...and each of us who is willing to allow it..

This is my prayer of thanksgiving, this day and everyday...in the blessed name of God in the loving presence of the holy Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.