

## **OPENING:**

If you remember from last week, John has been serving us a whole chapter's worth of material on... Bread.

It's okay if you missed it last week, or the week before, or even if you have already checked out this week, because next week: it's also John, Chapter 6, Bread.

John Chapter 6 has been called the "Grand Central Station" of the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel. So much stuff is going on that there is a lot to unpack and deal with. That's why we spend so much time with every 3 years.

Now, if your family was like mine, you had "Olympic fever" over the last month or so, cheering our athletes as they went for gold in Paris. I think that the author of our Gospel reading ALSO had the Olympics on his mind when he wrote our passage.

One of the things going on in this chapter is that John is negotiating the differences between Greek philosophy and this new thing called Christianity.

Think about it: the Olympic ideal is the human body becoming like a god's. Thus, the Greek gods come to earth from glorious Mt. Olympus and inhabit human bodies but they make them stronger, more beautiful.

Contrast that with Jesus who, on a rather pathetic hill in Jerusalem, puts his dusty skin in the game, and sweats and suffers and sacrifices.<sup>1</sup>

Two different understandings. The Greek one has the soul that tries to escape the flawed body, but the Judeo-Christian one where the body is "holy" as in "whole" fused with the soul, it's a flawed and broken instrument that nonetheless does God's work here on Earth.

So Greek philosophy *liked* this person named Jesus but *did not like* the yuckiness of it all (the flesh, and the blood, and the bread.)

The solution was: "Sure, Jesus was God, but only 'seemed' to be a human." He did not actually live and breathe and suffer like you or me.

John is pushing back against that here and saying: "He sure was!"

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright Lecture/ interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CxKn8ljncc>

“True Food and true drink”—strong incarnational language.

Now... what difference does that make?

All the difference in the world.

It means that we live in this world as members of Christ’s body, with the nourishment to do God’s mission, because we have this intimate connection to our brothers and sisters through Christ’s body and blood.

Still, we can have sympathy for the Greeks, Jesus said “I am the Living Bread”—but... but Jesus is not flour and water.

So we must take the imaginative leap to understand *this* story by using *other* stories.

I would like to tell such a story, this morning, to see if we can understand what John and Jesus were getting at.

### **CRADDOCK:<sup>2</sup>**

This story is about a famous preacher, named Fred Craddock, who was a Disciple of Christ minister and professor affiliated with Emory University.

A while back, Fred Craddock was invited to lead some kind of preaching mission in Winnipeg, Manitoba of all places.

When he finished the opening session Friday night, he noticed that it was spitting snow. His host told him not to worry, given that it was only mid-October.

“Good,” said Fred, “because all I brought from Atlanta was this little, thin jacket.”

Fred went to bed at his motel.

But when he got up the next morning, he couldn’t open the door for all the white stuff that was piled against it.

Snow driving.            Wind howling.    Temperature falling.            Phone ringing.

It was the host calling Fred’s motel room.

“I hate to tell you this, but we’re going to have to cancel this morning’s session.

Can’t tell about the evening. But things look pretty bad. Nobody saw this coming.”

The man went on:

“City’s not ready.    Plows, not ready.    Crews, not ready.    Nothing’s ready.

Worse yet, nothing’s open. In fact, I’m stuck in my driveway, meaning that I can’t come down to fetch you. So, I don’t know what you are going to do about breakfast.

But I do have an idea: If you can make it out of your room, walk down to the corner

... turn right ... go one block ... turn right again ... and you should be standing

within shouting distance of the bus station. There’s a little cafe in there. And if any

place is gonna be open, it’s gonna be open.”

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<sup>2</sup> Craddock, Fred B. Craddock Stories. edited by Mike Graves, and Richard F. Ward. 2001. St. Louis: Chalice, 83.

So Fred curses his luck,  
zips up his little jacket,  
busts out his door,  
and goes in search of the little cafe.

Two rights. Bus station. There it is. Wonder of wonders, it's open. But it's also crowded. It seems as if every stranded soul in the universe is crammed inside. There is no place to sit.

But some guy slides down the bench and makes room for Fred to squeeze in. The waiter comes over ... big burly guy ... non-shaven ... wearing half the kitchen on his apron.

"Whatcha want?" he snarls.

"Can I see a menu?" Fred asks.

"Don't need no menu," the waiter answers.

"Didn't get no deliveries this morning. All we got is soup."

"Well then," says Fred, "soup it is. I like a little breakfast soup from time to time."

So, the soup comes in a rather tallish mug. Looks awful. Shade of mousey gray. Fred half-wonders if that's what it could be ... cream of mouse. So he doesn't eat it. But he does use the mug as a stove ... cupping his fingers around it ... warming them on it.

Which is when the door opens once more. Wind howls. Cold surges.

"Shut the blankety-blank door," someone shouts. Lady enters. Thin coat. No hat. Ice crystals in her hair and eyebrows. Maybe 40. Painfully skinny. One of those. Men slide over to make room for her at another table.

"Whatcha want?" shouts the guy with the greasy apron.

"I'll just have a glass of water," she answers. "Look lady," he says. "We're crowded in here. We don't give no glasses of water. Either you order something or you leave!"

Well, the whole café's attention was on the scene now, it quickly becomes apparent that she isn't able to buy something. So she rebuttons her coat and commences to leave, to go out into the punishing snow and cold.

Time stand stills after all this commotion and then a funny thing happens.

One by one, everybody at her table gets up to leave, too. Followed by others ... at other tables. Even Fred (who still hasn't touched his soup) gets up to leave.

"All right ... all right," says the soup master. "She can stay." And he brings her a bowl of soup, on the house.

With order restored, Fred turns to his table mate and says: "Who is she? She must be somebody important." To which the guy says: "Never saw her before in my life. But I kinda figure if she's not welcome, ain't nobody welcome."

That pretty much settled the matter, to the point where all you could hear (for the next few minutes) were soup spoons clinking against the sides of the mugs.

Even Fred broke down and ate his soup.

Which wasn't half bad, really. Some might even call it tasty.

Later on, he still couldn't make out the taste ... but he felt as if he'd had it before.

But what was it? He couldn't remember. For the life of him, he couldn't remember.

Then it hit him. Strangest thing, really. That cream of mouse soup tasted, for all the world, like bread and wine. That was it ... for all the world it tasted like bread and wine.

### **SYNTHESIS:**

I love that story. My guess is you can tell stories like it, of meals that healed and touched and connected and fed you and others. Meals that happened in church, at the altar and in the parish hall and in soup kitchen, meals that happened at dining room tables and restaurants and diners.

We are a long way from Greek philosophy, a long way from John's story but...

The only thing that we can do is keep telling our stories and that story "in remembrance" of him who lived that story.

Keep living that story ourselves, keep offering ourselves up at the Table so Jesus does not "seem" to be real, so that Jesus is not present only as a superhero on some Olympian level, or worse as a "symbol" (remember last week?) but is present in our very selves and lives, in our very bodies.

In that way, this is how the story becomes present in our own lives, in our own stories, we are "Contaminated" when we participate in the Eucharistic meal, we get that bread in our bloodstream as we consume it and are consumed it, by the "subversive memory of Jesus."<sup>3</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

John gives it away by how he tells his story, by talking about "chewing" instead of eating and by not just saying "body" but saying "flesh."

Jesus is referring to his body, not simply his sinless, glorified body in heaven, nor simply a sterilized, white communion wafer in church.

What we are being asked "to eat" is that other part of his body (the mouse soup!), the community, the flawed body of believers here on earth."<sup>4</sup>

We are sharing, partaking, receiving and becoming the Body of Christ, that eats and drinks together, congregating in diners in Canada, in dusty hills in Palestine and in churches in Herndon, Virginia.

**AMEN**

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<sup>3</sup> Ched Myers. 2018. *Binding the Strong Man- A Political Reading of Mark's Study of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 443.

<sup>4</sup> Rolheiser, Ronald. 2014. *The Holy Longing: the Search for a Christian Spirituality*. Princeton, NJ: Image, 98.