

# Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

## AN ABIDING MEAL

John 6:51-58

## Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Bill White

51 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 So Jesus said to them, “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. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

---

## DIAGNOSIS: EAT, DRINK, AND BE BURIED

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Eat Jesus' Flesh? How?*

A number of scholars believe that the Gospel According to John

went through several versions or editions in order to address the theological needs of a changing Christian community. Hence, it appears our portion of John 6 is answering questions being posed in the early church relative to the Eucharist. Here the question is asked of the church via the Jews in Jesus' audience: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (v. 52).

Worshippers in our congregations may be asking the same question.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *In What Do We Abide?***

The problem is much deeper than giving satisfactory answers to questions of physics or explaining away accusations of cannibalism. The Gospel According to John is filled with double meanings. We read in chapter two the account of Jesus speaking of "this temple," but his listeners think he is speaking of a building that has been under construction for forty-six years. In chapter three Jesus teaches Nicodemus that we must be "born from above," but Nicodemus thinks of entering a second time into a mother's womb. In chapter four Jesus tells the Samaritan woman about "living water," but she thinks he is talking about the kind of stuff that is coming out of Jacob's well. And here in chapter 6 Jesus is teaching about "living bread," but his audience thinks he is talking about what they just ate. But eating bread is not eating Bread and drinking wine is not drinking Wine (vv. 51, 53-55). Moreover, Jesus said "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" (v. 56). "To abide" in this context is to have total trust in, to have faith in.

Therefore, the deeper question is: What bread and wine do we feed on, do we abide in? Do we abide in the bread and wine of human reason? Experience? Logic? Do we abide in the bread and wine of the Mosaic Passover, i.e. the Law? Or, do we abide in

the bread and wine that is the flesh and blood of Christ?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *Eating, Drinking, and Dying*

To not believe that Jesus is the crucified and risen Messiah, present in the community and present in, with, and under the bread and the wine of the Eucharist is to not abide in Christ and to not have Christ abide in them. Many see no need in being part of a community of believers that is the body of Christ. They see no need to participate in the Eucharist. For these people bread is bread and wine is wine; for these to eat the bread is to eat the bread that the ancestors ate... and they died (v. 58).

**PROGNOSIS: EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *Eating, Drinking, Living*

Jesus is the Messiah sent by the Father. Jesus is the Word of God who gives his life to the world: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (v. 51). In John's Gospel we see that Jesus did not keep the Passover before his death; he was the Passover! Jesus did not eat the Passover meal, Jesus was the Passover meal offering himself on the cross as the life-giving food and drink (vv. 54-55). And the same Jesus who was sent by the Father and gave his life on the cross has been raised by the Father so that all who eat and drink Jesus will live (v. 57).

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Abiding in Jesus*

This same Jesus comes specifically to us now, inviting you and me to feed on him. Jesus gives his life for our life, and Jesus gives us faith to believe that when we eat the bread and drink the wine of the Eucharist, it truly is his flesh and his blood

as he spoke of in John 6. By our eating and drinking in the Eucharistic meal, Jesus abides in us and we abide in him. Those feeding on Christ live forever, i.e. the good news of John 6:51, 54-58, is appropriated to the individual believer, and to the community of faith.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Eat Jesus' Flesh?***  
*Wow!*

Because we now fully participate in Christ's word, i.e. Jesus abides in us and we in him, we have both the promise of eternal life AND a meaningful life with God now. Rather than fretting over or arguing over the "how is this possible" question, we rejoice, give thanks, praise, and bask in the experience of Christ's very presence in our congregations' worship where with our brothers and sisters in Christ we feast on his body and blood. Moreover, we invite others to come and experience the Real Presence of Christ; we invite others to come to the feast!