

I took a group of kids on a hike in New Mexico to a waterfall. It was a hot day, we were in the mountain at altitude, and it was a long hike at least seven miles round trip. One of my volunteers hadn't eaten breakfast and on the hike didn't eat or drink much. Combined with the other factors I have describe she ended up seriously sick by the end. Food and drink are important. If we don't have them, we die. If we don't have them in difficult circumstances, we get sick. We regularly need food and drink to sustain our life.

All people look for life. The crowd has been following Jesus for the sake of their physical life. [It can be hard to look beyond physical life.] Yet, we're not talking just physical life, but life that is lived in the midst of physical life. (joy, a purpose, color, fullness) We look for Jesus to find this life whether we know it is Jesus that we are searching for. We all encounter Jesus. We encounter him as we have times of joy, wonder, deep emotion, significant conversation. Jesus is the one who brings and sustains life.

Yet, those who encounter Jesus complain about Jesus. Jesus claims he is the one who brings eternal life, that he is from heaven. But this is just a person who people know. But there must be other ways to eternal life. Why can't Jesus tell us how God brings life in a way that makes sense? Jesus as God incarnated among us, really?

Jesus bringing eternal life can't be understood if we start with general religious experience: where we take the idea of God that we have and apply it to Jesus. Rather we learn the meaning of God by coming to Jesus. (God doesn't just tell us about Jesus. Jesus tells us about God.) This is also how we know that God is at work, as we find Jesus, as we discover faith. Not as we feel good, not as we figure things out logically. God's voice is invisible yet He directs us to Jesus in whom we can see and participate in the life of God.

The knowledge of God comes through the presence in flesh and blood of Jesus a real man in a real time in a real place. This is the Father's accommodation to help us understand and embrace the divine. Jesus says, 'I tell you whoever believes has eternal life.'

But we can't see Jesus. This is where communion, scripture, proclamation comes in to play. Jesus' life can be seen lived out in scripture as related by eyewitnesses. Jesus can be seen in our lives and the words we speak. Jesus can be seen in the life of the community of faith, as we serve together, as we share life together, as we eat the bread and drink the cup together.

In 1 Kings, when her son gets sick the widow charges Elijah who she can see with causing the death of her son. Elijah represented God to the widow. He

couldn't heal the boy. He called out to God and God brought life into the child. The widow believed. She saw the life God offers through Elijah's relationship with God made evident in his actions.

Each person has the promise of being taught by God. It is each person's responsibility to listen and to learn. Preaching is just noise, actions are annoyances unless people are drawn by the Father's love to life. The widow could have believed Elijah and not God was the one who brought life to her son. The Holy Spirit takes our action and turns it into acts of grace. Jesus is the life giving power of God come down into the life of the world.¹

OK, we can handle this, Jesus brings life. Then Jesus says, 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

A dispute breaks out among those listening— he must have misspoke, he can't be serious, he is crazy.... We like the crowd when we hear or experience something that doesn't fit our understanding argue among ourselves. In doing so, we turn away from the only one who can help us Jesus. Debating an issue is not wrong, but when doing so keeps us from paying attention to Jesus then we are off track. It can be easier to argue with another than to listen to Jesus.

Jesus makes it clear 'eat my flesh, drink my blood or you have no life.' Belief is evidenced in eating. Is this metaphorical eating, where eating bread refers to learning, hearing, believing? Is it sacramental eating, where eating means becoming a participant in Jesus' dying and his risen life, a participation in the self-surrender of Jesus (the total self giving that shows the life of God in the midst of the life of the world?) What is clear is that taking Jesus into our lives sustains life.

Our faith is confirmed and sealed (and marked as faith given by God) by eating Jesus. It makes us who we are. Just as what we eat physically makes up our body, gives us health and life, literally shapes us. What we eat spiritually makes us who we are. [I remember in biology class doing a test with carrots and chocolate donuts. I was the volunteer. I took a bite of donut and held it in my mouth and my teacher pushed my extended arm down. When I had the bite of carrot in my mouth she couldn't push my arm down. As we eat Jesus, he gives us health and life and shapes us.

There is no knowing Christ without a visceral total engagement. We can't be spectators and try to believe from afar or in some abstract concepts of faith. In the eating of Jesus there is intimacy. There is gaining life and there is abiding in Jesus (v. 54-56.) We are joined with Jesus. We share his life. In this eating of Jesus, we are also joined with all those who share his life into him (his body.) We are joined together, we share life together. As they take in (feed on our love) it gives them life and we too gain life.

Author Julie Clawson challenges us, “Far from being so filled with the Spirit that we want to act like Jesus and love our neighbor, Christians today are finding whatever way they can to twist the words of Jesus to mean the exact opposite. It’s hard to love our neighbors. It takes sacrifice. It takes empathy. It takes repentance of our own sins. It is a lot easier to simply pretend that Jesus said something else instead. Why care for the poor when it is easier to continue to make money off of their oppression and call it prosperity and blessing? Why be filled with the Spirit when the status quo is so much more attractive? Why listen to Jesus when the pundits just make so much more sense?”ⁱⁱ

When we take in Jesus. We believe. We eat. We see the world differently. When we take Jesus in, there is skepticism about the values, things that the world says bring life, that society says bring meaning, that others say we should pursue. When we encounter Jesus we are asked to see the world differently. Not flat and demystified, but full of God’s power and multilayered. A world where we can eat Jesus and live. Where we get beyond bread as water, flour, and yeast. Where we don’t just follow Jesus but we consume him.

He wants all of us, he wants us to have all of him.

ⁱ Newbigin, Lesslie, “The Light Has Come”, 86

ⁱⁱ <http://julieclawson.com/> viewed 6-9-10 ‘After Pentecost’