

Pentecost 16B  
Peace, Seattle  
August 23, 2015  
John 6:56-69

## **INGESTING JESUS**

We relished fresh soda bread in Ireland and hot cross buns on Iona.  
And in France we renewed our love relationship with baguettes and croissants.  
So when we arrived in Italy last spring we were prepared to savor authentic Italian pane.

But when we sunk our teeth into the bread we bought from Italian grocers we found ourselves greatly disappointed—the bread was flavorless and overdone—not at all the experience we expected.

There was one exception. At a little hole-in-the-wall bakery in Vernazza we found the most incredible focaccia bread we'd ever tasted...soft and chewy, drizzled with olive oil, and sprinkled with salt. **It was molto bene!** But that bread was the exception rather than the rule.

The night we arrived back in Boston from Rome, we ate at (what else!) an Italian restaurant called Bertucci's—as if we hadn't had enough Italian food lately!

After taking our order our waitress brought us a basket of fresh, hot rolls straight from the oven. We picked up the rolls, eyed each other...then took the first bite...and it was SO good.

**We told our waitress about our experiences with the breads of Italy and she told us a story.**

Turns out she also worked at the other Bertucci's location, in Cambridge—where two of her regular customers there were none other than Tom and Ray Magliozzi, hosts of NPR's CAR TALK.

"Whenever Tom and Ray came in," she said, "I'd bring these fresh, soft rolls to their table, and they'd say 'PUT THEM BACK IN THE OVEN FOR A WHILE.' As far as they were concerned," she said, "the rolls weren't ready to eat until they were hard, dry and overdone."

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**Well, bread has been at the center of the gospel for five weeks now, in reading after reading from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John. Today is the final one, and if you've been listening in each week, I can understand if you think the topic's been overdone!**

**By the time Jesus is done talking about BREAD many of his followers have had enough, too.** If fact, John tells us, some of them are so turned off by Jesus' rhetoric about eating flesh and drinking blood that they no longer want to hang out with him.

**Jesus knew how central the story of bread was to the life of God's people.**  
He knew about the manna in the wilderness.  
He knew about the bread of affliction in the Passover meal.  
He knew about the miracle of flour and oil that saved Elijah and the widow of Zarephath.

**And he knew that the "living Father" had sent him to be Bread for the world.**

**Throughout this 6th chapter Jesus progressively sharpens the language he uses around bread, upping the ante on the claim that he is the Bread of Life, God's word made flesh. And in today's final verses he does it once more.**

UNLESS YOU EAT THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN AND DRINK HIS BLOOD, he tells those around him, YOU HAVE NO LIFE IN YOU. THOSE WHO EAT MY FLESH AND DRINK MY BLOOD ... ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN THEM.

**The original language is instructive here.**

**The verb Jesus uses—“*trago*”— means “to gnaw or gobble.” It’s an animal verb...**

The kind of language you’d use to describe what seals and orcas are doing right now to the salmon migrating through the Sound.

**For many of his followers this teaching was too much. EAT HIS FLESH? DRINK HIS BLOOD?** They couldn’t get their minds around it. And it’s no less easy for you and me.

In fact, much of time the words of Jesus in John are like the fish that a guy had hooked on Friday (at Lincoln Park): He could feel it on his line, and catch a glimpse of its size and beauty, but it wriggled away before he could land it on shore.

**So, what IS all this talk about?**

**We are called to a relationship of total intimacy with Jesus; a relationship of abiding so completely with him that we can’t tell where he ends and where we begin.**

**In Jesus, at this Table, we meet God face to face**, calling us back to covenant, back to primary relationship, back to fundamentals—and it doesn’t get any more fundamental than this—**Jesus wants me and you literally, to take him into ourselves organically, entirely.**

**For when**, in the sacred mystery we call Holy Communion, we ingest Jesus, he becomes one with our cells—flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood—truly becoming one with us and we with him.

**There can be no arm’s length relationship with Jesus here. For he is no mere emblem or symbol, he is life itself!**

**And we, having taken him into ourselves, we in turn become his body in and for the world.**

As I watched news reports Friday about the fires that are devastating communities east of the mountains, I heard the story about Alex Thomason, who lives in Okanogan County.

He’s not a firefighter by training—he’s a lawyer—but fighting fires has become an obsession of late. So much so that he bought his own fire truck in order to make a bigger impact on the fires that were threatening not only his home but those of his neighbors.

And it’s not just fire hoses he uses to fight flames. He also digs fire lines. He’s part of a whole crew of guys who have organized in the face of this year’s wildfires to serve their neighbors.<sup>1</sup>

I don’t know that Alex Thomason’s faith life looks like—or if he even has one—but I believe that, ultimately, this reaching toward neighbor is what the whole thread of God’s story from Abraham onward has been moving toward:

That we, who are called through Font and Table into a relationship with Jesus so intimate that we take him into ourselves bodily as well as spiritually—we through water, wine and wheat become

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<sup>1</sup> To see the story, follow this link: <http://www.khq.com/clip/11785009/man-buys-firetruck-to-help-fight-fires>

for each other, become for others what he became for us—bread (and in this case, water) for the world.

The eternal life that Jesus invites us into, doesn't begin in some distant future, at some distant place. It begins right here, right now, as we take what he offers us, and in that taking, find ourselves one with him, and one with his mission.

**Let us pray:**

Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. May this conviction, like yeast in a batch of dough, like water in a firehose, so saturate our lives individually and the life of our congregation, that neighbor, friend and stranger will see in our life and mission that which will bring them life. Make it be so, Lord Jesus. Amen.