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The Rev. Kate Byrd

“For the Life of the World”

There are days when I ponder, if I had been born in the time of Jesus would I have followed him? Would I have heard his message and thought, surely this is the Word of God or more so this truly is the Good News of salvation. I mean, it's easy to say it now, Christianity has stood (more or less) the test of time, being that it's over 2,000 years since Jesus lived and died and rose again, and the body of Christ still exists. I mean look around, we are still here gathering and following (as best we can) the life and teachings and way of Jesus. But, think for a moment that you had never heard of Christianity, of Jesus's teachings and life, or his eventual death and resurrection. All you knew were the complexities this life bears, the constant striving to produce and provide, the cultural and political divisions, the necessity to live with the life and body and status you have been born into. And, as you begin to search to see if maybe there was more to it all, something better, something like deliverance, this man named Jesus shows up on the scene and begins preaching about things like “the bread of life” or better yet eternal salvation! But, this is not just any bread or any salvation, or even any message. Which becomes clear as you hear this man Jesus explain, “my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” What would you think? I mean I feel like if I heard that, without any other context (like 2,000 years of theological apologetics or Biblical commentaries) I would be fairly put off, concerned, maybe even a bit afraid. Just as the Jews gathered there that day were, as we heard them (rightfully so) questioning, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” I mean come on it's not the most appealing invitation, in fact it's fairly scandalous, if not down right disgusting!

I've said it before and I'll say it again, when I really sit down and study the Gospels there are times when I do not understand, and cannot begin to fathom, how these teachings, this story, and the Way of Christ, now known as Christianity, has become one of the world's leading religions. Because it asks a lot of us, of our faith in a God who sent down his only son to die a brutal death on the cross, literally giving over his flesh and blood. Of our understanding of all the paradoxes Jesus continually preaches, like eating that same flesh and blood and being given eternal life (even though we know the disciples are no longer here to tell the tale). Or, of our belief in a grace that comes simply from the fact that Jesus offered his flesh and blood, which we celebrate every Sunday on that altar and around that table. And yet, the only thing Jesus is asking of us (at least in this passage), is that we partake of the beauty of what he is offering, which is EVERYTHING he has to give, his entire life, his whole being, his literal body. As Jesus says in our passage from John 6, “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh... the one who eats this bread will live forever.” Taking us all the way back to the first chapter in our Gospel Authors book, as John stated “In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the word became flesh.” Now, allowing Jesus to offer not

only himself as a person, but also as God, the Word at the beginning of time, who was and is and is to come. Inviting us to take part in something like divinity and something even more like eternity, simply through the act of sharing a meal.

While I continue to wonder aloud, this morning, I will share one more wonderment with you, which is what it means to us, to you, to me, to be a part of the church who comes together on Sunday mornings to sit in pews and gather around the altar. I mean there are so many other things we could be doing on a Sunday morning, especially given the amount of sporting events, attractive brunch opportunities, farmers markets, and I won't go on because I really may begin to deter you from showing up here. But, you know what I am talking about, and you get the picture, there are many attractive options vying for our attention on Sunday morning. What is it that brings us together, especially in a world that is increasingly (for lack of a better word) "unchurched." What do we have to offer that is so special? What is so attractive about what we are doing here Sunday after Sunday? And, then I hear this passage and I see that table and I remember, we are participating in something like the Divine eternal dance between space and time and God! We are not only remembering who Jesus was while he walked on this earth, we are taking him in and becoming a part of his message, a part of his way, a part of his salvation for the life of the world! Because that bread and that wine, whether you see them as literal body and blood, or symbolic memorial wafers and tawny port, are an invitation to participate and become part of the body of Christ, from the time the little boy shared his two loaves and five fish at the feeding of the five thousand, or the time the disciples gathered with Jesus for the last supper all the way until today when you kneel and hold your hands out to receive something like living bread, like good news, like eternal salvation for the life of the world. Because it is there at that table that we come to partake not only in the mystery of how the Word became Flesh but also in Jesus' greatest commandment to "love one another as I have loved you." As we take in and take on Christ's way of non-violent, sacrificial, self giving way of love! The way that leads us to God, that leads us to eternal life, that leads us to participate in the salvation for the life of the world!

And so, as we gather at that table shortly I encourage us to consider what it means to partake of living bread, to sink our teeth into Jesus' way of love, and become one with the Word who was and is and is to come. Does it allow us to embody a bit more of the Divine? Does it remind us that we are connected in a story that spans before and beyond our own mortal lives? Does it call us to remember you are part of the body of Christ, called to give life to the World, by loving as Jesus loved and by giving up ourselves and our life? Because that bread and that wine may have the power to change us, if we dare, the choice is ours! Either way, the eternal celebration, the unconditional love, and the offering of salvation will always be there and be ready for us to participate in it, in as much as we choose to sink our teeth in and take a big gulp of all the Divine has to offer.