

Proverbs 9:1-6  
Ephesians 5:15-20  
St. John 6:51-58**GOSPEL: John 6:51-58**

*In John's gospel, the feeding of the five thousand leads to extended teaching in which Jesus identifies himself as the true "bread of life." Finally, in these verses, he makes a connection that would not be understood until after his death, in light of the church's celebration of the eucharist.*

[Jesus said,] <sup>51</sup> "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."

<sup>52</sup>The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" <sup>53</sup>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. <sup>54</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; <sup>55</sup>for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup>Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>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."

If Jesus wanted to come, would we let him? If he were fishing for an invitation, and he let us know that he would like to come, what would we do? (We would appoint a committee, of course, but what would the committee decide?)

I expect the committee would look at our building (to see if we could accommodate the crowd that would show up), and it would look at our attendance (to see if we would have enough people to welcome him appropriately), and it would look at our schedule (to see when we could host him properly)...and then we'd postpone the decision.

That's a very important decision, after all. That's what you do with important decisions. We wouldn't be sure about a lot of things...and we'd stay that way.

I suspect that's why he didn't wait for an invitation when he came two thousand years ago. God didn't check with the world leaders to see when they would be ready for his son to come live in the world... He had an idea that they would start making plans, and deciding which group of people were the right ones for him to stay with...and setting his agenda...and postponing his arrival until they got each other straightened out...and deciding which people had to be kept away from God's Son because they were the wrong sort of people...and postponing his arrival until they had reached some understandings...

Jesus didn't wait. He came. Uninvited, unexpected, even unwelcome. God came. It was his idea. He came to everyone, even those who hadn't begun to prepare for him.

People made no preparations at all. Jesus was a part of their lives because he wanted to be.

It was the same story when Jesus wanted people to know how he would continue to be part of their lives. We have his words in this morning's Gospel lesson. "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. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life."

That's a crass thing to say. It's hard to put a good construction on eating flesh and drinking blood. I don't think our committee would have approved that statement for any of our official publications advertising Jesus' arrival – when we got around to letting him come. But, we've already demonstrated that Jesus was never interested in our decisions - so he said it anyway.

Jesus wanted to associate the most common thing we do - eating - with every thing about himself - his flesh and blood. Jesus ties the sacrament of communion and his own life so closely together that they become the same thing.

Communion is a sacrament. "Sacrament" is one of those words we throw around in church. Two things make a sacrament. It must be physical, something you can see and feel. And it must have been originated by Jesus. We recognize two sacraments in this Church: baptism and communion. The physical element of baptism is water. In communion, the physical elements are the bread and wine.

We emphasize the sacraments in our worship. We place the font (where we celebrate baptism) in the center of our worship area. We place the altar (where we celebrate communion) right in the center of the chancel. The sacraments are what God has given us as his pure, undeserved grace.

Perhaps the most important thing to know about a sacrament is how they are like the perfect sacrament - Jesus Christ. Jesus, in his life and ministry, is everything a sacrament can be. He is the grace of God in physical form. God became human; to be seen and touched. Just as we can see and touch water. We can see and touch bread and wine. Jesus came in physical form. He could be seen and touched – the grace of God in physical form.

Jesus did not wait for our preparations - neither do the sacraments.

There is a story about our "preparations" for communion. It's told about Martin Luther. A student at the university where Luther taught had kept himself from worship for quite a while and finally went to Luther to talk about his troubles. He said, "I just can't go to communion, Dr. Luther. I'm not worthy." Luther responded, "Of course you're not worthy. That's why you must go. If you deserved the grace of God you wouldn't need it."

If the world had waited until it was properly prepared before it would allow Jesus to come, the world would still be waiting. If we waited until we were sure we correctly understood, and were all in agreement about who Jesus was and where he should stay and who he should talk to and how he should spend his time...if we waited until we were worthy - Jesus still wouldn't be here.

This is God's idea. Pure grace. He has decided to come into our lives and he has decided how. Baptism and communion.

It's almost certain we wouldn't have chosen this way...and we wouldn't have used these words: "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. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life."

This is the command of Christ. The most common thing people do - eating. The first thing a new born does at the beginning of life and the last thing we stop doing before we die. Jesus decided how he would be part of our lives.

Still, we often weigh the situation to decide about the presence of God in our world. "He says he will come in this sacrament? Let's wait. We will wait until we see the benefit of this sacrament. We will wait until it makes sense to us. We will wait until we are worthy. We will wait until we know it will do some good."

Christ didn't wait. He decided to come.

It's true. When Christ came into the world he did not change everyone's life. Some will not hear that God loves them. It doesn't make sense that God is interested in our lives. Terrible things happen in this world and some people assume that means either God is not involved in our world or he's not a God we would welcome. Some simply have not heard that they were created for a purpose and their lives are important - because we haven't told them.

Christ did come of his own choice...and it hasn't changed every life in the world. Grace can always be rejected.

But grace does not wait for us to earn it. Christ comes. A sacrament is like Jesus himself, it's what God does.

Come to the table. This is the way Jesus comes to us. This sacrament is how he decided to physically remind us that he is part of our lives. As always, Jesus comes into our lives...not because of our preparations, or our understanding, or what we've done to deserve it. Jesus has decided to come into our lives. This is the way he chose to make us a part of his decision.

We don't participate in this sacrament because we have gotten all ready and we are satisfied with the way our lives are. We come because this is where Christ has promised to meet us and be part of our lives.

He promised us this morning as we read his words, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day."

God will live with us and make our lives better. Christ has never come to people as a reward for what they've done. He comes to give us direction for what we should do, to give us strength, and to tell us what our lives are for.

Jesus comes undeserved, uninvited, sometimes unwelcome. It's his idea to give us strength. He has decided to be part of our lives. He will come into our lives and make them part of eternal life.