

“Questions and Answers”

In the name of our risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

On one of my pastoral visits, a recent one earlier this summer, I spent an hour or so with one of our members whose young grandchild happened to be visiting. I learned very early on that this child was a walking question mark? Who are you? What's your name? What do you do? What's for dinner? When will my Daddy get a job? Will Grandpa live to be 100? That child did not know it, of course, but his questions sounded a lot like the ones that pop up in our news feed? How safe is our food supply? Why didn't Canada win more gold medals at the Olympics? What will happen to the economy? Can our health care system cope with the rising number of baby boomers entering the system? Questions surround us, with more added each day in the face of every technological advance, political debate, ecological disaster or family crisis. It takes a special kind of wisdom to sort out which questions are the important ones.

The disciples found plenty of questions to ask both before and during their time with the earthly Jesus. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” “How can these things be?” “This teaching is different, who can accept it?” All these questions, by the way, come from the Gospel of John, which has been our focus these last few Sundays.

Perhaps, then, we shouldn't be too hard on the people who ate their fill of the bread on the mountainside and chased Jesus down on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Like people today they look for answers. “What must we do to perform the works of God? What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe in you?”

The answers they received are not the ones they expected or wanted. Such is the way toward wisdom, after all. “Believe in him whom he has sent.” “I am the living bread that came down from heaven, the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

As some of you know, for the last three years or so, I have been our Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Anglican Church of Canada, they call it the Council of General Synod or COGS for short. One of the neat things they do, at their meetings, is have someone they bring from another Anglican Church body from somewhere in the Anglican communion, which like our Lutheran World Federation, is all over the world. At the last meeting, in May, the representative was an Anglican priest from one of those Pacific Islands that we associate with paradise. Father Samuel was his name, I can't pronounce his last name. At one of our meal breaks, I sat with Father Samuel and peppered him with questions about his country, his ministry, his family. Father Samuel told me that he is descended from a long line of chiefs on his home island. “My great-great-grandfather was a cannibal,” he exclaimed. “They say he ate more than 900 men and it made him a strong and powerful man.” I tried to mock my horror which wasn't easy as I had just finished a dinner of roast pork. “He buried some of the bodies under his house,” Samuel continued. “You can read about it at the museum on my island,” he added, in case I doubted his story.

Let me read to you verse 53 of today's gospel reading. “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

Did I hear that correctly? I think of the power ascribed to Samuel's great-great-grandfather – the power of 900 men. I picture the remains of bodies supporting the pillars of that island house, a distant culture's exemplar of conspicuous consumption. Two thousand years of theology and interpretation

have buffered us from the horror of this image. Why would Jesus teach with such a shocking metaphor? “Eat the flesh, drink his blood.”

Perhaps shock is necessary to drag our appetites and attention away from the cultural drive to conquer and consume, whether the object of consumption is the earth or one another. We are driven toward things that do not bring life. A bumper sticker reads, “Born to shop,” as if our highest calling is to spend our resources detecting a good sale instead of discerning a good soul. Maybe it takes a little shock and horror to turn us toward the kind of consumption that brings life.

The first words out of Jesus’ mouth in John, chapter one, took the form of a question: “What are you seeking?” The question invites – even demands a response. What are you looking for? When your belly is filled, what do you need? Deep inside, in the hungry places of your heart, where 1,000 Facebook friends, a new car or money in the bank cannot touch, what is it that you seek?

The disciples got to the heart of the matter by asking, “Where are you staying?” “Where do you abide?” The rest of the Gospel of John is a response to that question: “Come and see.”

Come and see the Word made flesh that dwelt among us. Come and see what it looks like to participate in the incarnated life. Come and see a life that is more about its quality than about its quantity, whether it is quantity of years or a quantity of what our culture tells us we should all want to consume. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them,” Jesus says. Find the answers to your questions in this. Consume the fullness of God that it may abide with you.

After all, my brothers and sisters, you are what you eat. AMEN.