



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

***Real Presence The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost 8152021***

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving God. Amen. As a kid growing up, it was for the most part, just my dad, my little brother and me, which meant my dad did most of the cooking. He made us breakfast every day in the morning, packed us a lunch for school, dinner each night. I got to make the brownies, however, and on Sundays he would make us a big traditional breakfast. You know, sausage, eggs, hash browns, and pancakes. And he was very much a creature of habit. You could always know what day of the week it was by that breakfast.

Well, one Sunday morning. He called us in as usual and was really excited. He had a huge beaming smile on his face because he could not wait for us to try these new pancakes that he had been working to perfect. It was a recipe for pancakes from scratch. So my brother and I, we tried them. Our expectations were reasonably high. Well, they were different. They had a kind of aftertaste, to be honest. It was hard to explain. I remember telling my dad, they have a taste that kind of comes back at you. And when I said that, he's like, yes, exactly. That's what I was after, because that's how my dad's tasted. His parents had both died when he was just a kid. And his dad used to make him scratch pancakes that were also known for a taste that kind of came back at you.

Well, my brother and I, we were also creatures of habit by that point. And we were quite vocal about our desire to go back to our beloved. I think it was Krusty's pancake mix, but my dad would have nothing of it. He didn't even seem to mind that we would make fun of their unusual taste. Or when he wasn't looking, throw them like Frisbees across the room to our family dog, who with Olympic level precision never failed to catch them and swallow them in one silent move that my dad never noticed. At least, so we thought.

Well, it didn't matter. None of it phased him. He would never go back to making pancakes any other way again. And as fate would have it a few months ago, I was making pancakes myself for my girls. And we had run out of our usual pancake mix. So I did some quick Googling and improvised with ingredients from the pantry. And wouldn't you know it, they tasted just like my dad's. They had that same unique flavor.

And as I ate them, I was sort of taken back in time and space, back to our old kitchen table. I could hear the squeaky chair. I always sat in. I could feel my little

legs dangling. I could hear my dad's laugh as if he was right there with us. And it occurred to me. That's the reason he insisted on making those scratch pancakes all those years, because it was how he made his dad present to him.

Is there a food that does that for you? Is there a recipe, a flavor that can carry someone's memory for you and make them feel present? Kind of like the way a song can bring you back to where you were when you first heard it. Can even evoke the very feelings that we had at the time. There's something about the way our senses can tap into our neural pathways and trigger a memory that is far more than mere recollection. Time and space peel away and they can bring us back to those we love.

I wonder if Jesus had this in mind when, on the night before facing his own death, He invited us to remember Him in a meal of all things. Think about it. Of all the ways he could have asked us to remember Him, He chose food and drink. Bread and wine. And perhaps Jesus knew that there would be times when we too would feel distant from Him. Maybe lose sight of Him from time to time. And like my dad, need a sure way to feel His presence again.

And yes, the risen Christ is always with us, but daily life in this broken world has a way of making that hard to remember sometimes. It's what makes sense to me that as He was preparing to leave this world, He would leave us with the Eucharist. A sure way, no matter how rejected we might feel, it would always be a place we can go where we will never be turned away. No matter how lonely life might get, there would always be a community we could come together. No matter how much pain life might inflict on us, no matter how many the injustices, that there would always be a place where we could come to find solace and wholeness.

When we have hurt others, by what we have done or by what we have left undone, there would always be a place we can come to find forgiveness. A place where no matter how bleak the future might seem, no matter how bad the new sounds, there would always be a place we could come to find hope, hope for the day, when all things are made new. A table where we could taste and see that God and Christ is indeed present, is in us and with us, where we can be fed in body and spirit so that we might in turn, feed the world.

And as you probably caught in the readings this morning, we're on, I think, week four of Jesus's discourse on the bread of life, and Jesus is getting increasingly graphic, talking about flesh and blood, trying to drive the point home to a crowd who is still not getting it. Still fixated on loaves and fishes, Jesus is trying to get them to see it's not about the bread. It's about me. Remember in the Gospel of John, Jesus is the word made flesh. He is the embodiment of God's word. And so we are to feed on Him first and foremost in our lives.

But He also seems to want them to understand that it's not merely symbolism He's talking about. Jesus even uses a verb that our text translates as *to eat*, but it's perhaps better translated as *to chew* or *to gnaw*. Think of your favorite rib joint, fried chicken. That's driving home the point that feeding on Jesus isn't just a head trip. It's not a self-help seminar. It's not a disembodied podcast on a mountain top somewhere.

It's a visceral embodied experience. We physically come to this table in our bodies so we can take living bread into ourselves, so that He might abide in us and we in Him and together practice what Rowan Williams calls, the divine flow giving and receiving, invitation and acceptance, welcome and belonging.

And yes, it is a hard teaching to hear. The early church was accused of advocating cannibalism. And if we were to keep reading that passage from this morning, we'd see that many of those listening to Jesus had heard enough and ended up walking away. And naturally some of the biggest theological debates in the history of church have been over the Eucharist. Is it just a symbolic remembrance, a memorial as the Protestants traditionally hold? Or is there an actual change in the substance of the bread such that it actually becomes Christ's body. The more Catholic view.

For me, I appreciate the Episcopal approach, and to do what we so often do. We find a kind of middle ground, and we resist the temptation to try to explain the mystery or to try to pin down exactly how the bread is changed or the precise moment it happens. And instead be content to know that however it happens, when we gather around this table and taste this bread, one thing is absolutely sure. Christ becomes truly present, the real presence.

As a seminary professor once told me, at the end of the day, communion is not about figuring out what we are doing to the bread, but about noticing what the bread is doing to us. How does coming to this table help us to not just see God, but help us to change the way we see one another? How does leaving our pews and coming forward to kneel at a common rail to receive a common meal, help us to leave our differences behind? Our differences around beliefs and politics, race, sexuality, class, age, education, economics, and on and on and on. How do they recede into the background and lose their importance as we are forced to see one another, not through the lens of our differences, but as fellow invited guests, people whose presence is desired by God just as much as my own?

I caught a glimpse of that one Sunday morning while serving as a Eucharistic minister. I was following behind the priest, offering the chalice to each person kneeling at the rail. And I kind of did a double-take as I realized the person I had just given communion to was Super Bowl quarterback, Drew Brees, big celebrity pro athlete. And I almost didn't even notice him. He was just kneeling there like everybody else.

And as I continued moving down the line, next to him was a gay man who was really active in local progressive politics. And next to him was an elderly widow who I happened to know was a staunch Republican. Next to her was a teenager. Next to her was a divorced single dad who was next to a homeless man who lived in the park, across the street. And next to him, well, you get what I'm saying? Each one of them could not have been more different yet gathered around that table, shoulder to shoulder sharing a simple meal. They simply became people, invited guests of the one who sees each of them as beloved and invites each of us to see that too.

It was a vision of the eternal life that Jesus describes in the gospel, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, where with all the saints, famous and not so famous, known and unknown in all their differences and diversities where they all gather as one chorus. Forever singing God's praises having become once again, what we were created to be all along; one people united in Christ, one body, one flock.

Amen.