

O taste and see that the Lord is good

Proverbs 9:1–6

Psalm 34:9–14

Ephesians 5:15–20

John 6:51–58

Text: Psalm 34:8; Proverbs 9:5; John 6:53

O taste and see that the Lord is good;

Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

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.

Introduction

When we read this saying of Jesus about eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking his blood, it is good to keep in mind that we use the metaphor of eating and drinking more commonly than we might think. We ‘devour’ books, ‘drink in’ a lecture (maybe even a sermon), ‘swallow’ a story; we may ‘ruminate’ on an idea (ruminate comes from the Latin word that means to ‘chew the cud’), we ‘chew over’ a matter, we ‘stomach’ something said, or find ourselves unable to do so. And I have heard more than one grandmother expressing their delight over the beauty of a newborn grandchild declaring they could just ‘eat them up,’ whereas to bite someone’s head off conveys a different notion entirely. This metaphor of eating and drinking; Jesus used it to speak of the profoundest intimacy with him, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” Jesus is talking about the relationship of faith.

1. “O taste and see that the Lord is good,’ exudes the Psalmist. Have you ever had someone say to you that you must go to a particular restaurant and try a certain dish or dessert—it is simply ‘to die for?’ I suppose now we send pictures of the food on the plate in letting others know how good something tasted. Why do we do this? Usually our recommendation is because we want our friends to experience something that we find to be really good. But why does the Psalmist need to tell us that God is good?

In broad strokes, the biblical story is that we humans are fallen creatures. We have each turned away from God and gone our own way. At the heart of this story is the human doubting the goodness of God. God planted the Garden of Eden full of trees that made for goodness for life; for the very purpose of human flourishing. There was one tree they were forbidden to eat from; the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ‘Good and evil’ is an Hebraism that means ‘whatever the human mind can conceive.’ God’s parameters for human life are for our blessing, our flourishing. But we don’t trust that God wants our good or that God is good.

O taste and see that the Lord is good! I admire people who have maintained life-long friendships from school days. I acknowledge that when I was young I didn’t pay attention to friendships and, consequently, don’t have, what appears to me, the joy of friendships that have endured throughout the whole course of life. I recently read an article titled [Friendship in Truth](#) by a professor named Robert Wilken; he began by saying, “I have had many friends in the course of my life, but only since growing older have I given much thought to the nature of friendship.”

In the concluding part of the article Wilken wrote, “The deepest friendship exists only among those whose lives are oriented to a higher good. Many things bind friends together—reading, painting, sailing, travel, adventure, ideas—but there must be some other thing, some immaterial quarry. In the Christian tradition that quarry can only be *the good*, as Augustine explains. We may speak of this being good and that being good; we must take away “this” and “that” and “see good itself.” The good itself is God, “not good with some other good, but the good of every good.” Not the good one can hover over with judgment, but the good one can cleave to in love. And what is this but God?

Like Wilken, it is in my more mature years that I have paid better attention to this matter of friendships. I am blessed with some wonderful friends each of whom I know would immediately help me if I called upon them. I note that our friendships revolve around different things—travel, ministry, golf, cycling, theology—but the enduring part of each of these friendships is grounded in our mutual orientation to the goodness of God. Wilken said “True friendship requires a third person, God, who looks on, delights, beckons us, directs us, and carries us beyond ourselves.” I have found that God is good and blesses with friendships grounded in him. And these friendships are but a little taste of God’s goodness.

We have this tendency to compartmentalize life and think of the spiritual life as a periphery thing—it is to be personal and private what we go to do on Sunday. Thinking thus, we limit Jesus to what we consider religious activity. The gospel does not see life this way—everything is spiritual because the human is a spiritual being. Jesus said to his disciples, “I have called you friends.” I wonder if we have sold Jesus short—this friendship with God permeates into every aspect of our lives and we find the Psalmist is correct—when we taste Him we do find that the Lord is good.

2. In the older testament book of Proverbs wisdom is personified. “Wisdom has built her house,” writes the author, “Come,” says wisdom, “eat my bread and the wine I have mixed.” It was the Apostle Paul who said Jesus Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

What is wisdom? What does it mean to be wise? A dictionary definition puts it this way, ‘the ability to use your knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgment.’ In today’s world we have unprecedented knowledge literally at our finger tips but we know that wisdom is more than having correct information. Wisdom is more than our ability to understand the information before us. Wisdom has to do with the application of what we have understood. You may know all about a cart and a horse, but wisdom tells you, ‘don’t put the cart before the horse.’

As noted with you on other occasions, we must never assume that wisdom is only found among Christians. God, the creator of the human with faculty to live wisely, is generous with wisdom for life. God is not stingy, but open handed. Wisdom is found among different peoples in every era. Luke tells us that “Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” John Wesley, having understood the importance of that Egyptian wisdom which Moses acquired, used to urge his 18th century Methodist followers to “plunder the Egyptians.” By “plunder the Egyptians” Wesley meant that sensible Christians will be grateful for wisdom they come upon anywhere.

To be sure, the wisdom we come upon anywhere at all we shall modify and adapt in light of the light which Jesus Christ is.

In discussing what a believer's life looks like, the Apostle Paul, in his Ephesian letter, wrote, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil." What does this wisdom look like? He goes on to give an example: Do not get drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit. You will notice the metaphor of imbibing. Do we not hear an echo, in Paul's admonition, of wisdom's invitation from Proverbs—"Come eat my bread and the wine I have mixed."

Jesus' saying about eating his flesh and drinking his blood comes in the wake of the miraculous feeding of five thousand. When Jesus said that he was the bread from heaven people were thinking physical bread and wanted more of it; like the woman at the well when Jesus said he was living water she thought of the water she would draw from the well. Jesus is talking about offering us himself. The point I invite you to consider is that Jesus is the wisdom of God and his wisdom is the wisdom that was at work in our creation. He is the wisdom of God, a wisdom that is to permeate every area of our lives. In following Jesus, in making the pattern of his living our own, who we truly are emerges.

It is also clear that in discussing this saying of Jesus about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, the supper of our Lord is in the Apostle John's mind. It is likely that what we read in John's gospel is a mediation offered for understanding the bread and the wine in the church's eucharist service. One theologian remarked, "when we come to church and when we take to ourselves the bread and the wine of the Holy Supper, our thoughts are far too small. We cannot exaggerate what we're getting through that meal. Mostly our imaginations are simply not big enough, our expectations are pedestrian and trivial. What Jesus is offering us is a slice of Life Eternal, of the very Life force that pulses as the heartbeat to everything that exists, that ever existed, or that ever will exist."

3. Not only was bread eaten at Israelite meals; wine was drunk at every meal as well. Where wine is concerned our Israelite foreparents differed from our society in two ways. On the one hand, they abhorred drunkenness, finding it disgusting, whereas we seem to find it amusing. On the other hand, Israelite people customarily drank wine at every meal. The rare exception was the highly unusual ascetic like John the Baptist. John, it must be remembered, lived in the wilderness, dressed in animal skins, ate an unusual diet, and drank no wine. Jesus did none of this.

Again and again the Older Testament speaks of wine as God's gift that gladdens the heart of men and women. Wine doesn't appear to be essential to life. Bread is essential to life, but not wine. Yet wine is essential to life, said our Hebrew foreparents, just because joy is essential to life. Life in the kingdom of God is never to be bleak or drab or dull. Life must never become utilitarian only. In addition to the utilitarian there has to be a light heart and a glad countenance, a happy time and a festive mood.

Jesus, we know frequently went to parties; so often that his enemies accused him of overdoing it. They said he ate too much and he drank too much. Whereupon he wheeled on his detractors,

“John came neither eating nor drinking and you said he was demon-possessed, crazy if not wicked. I’ve come eating and drinking, and you call me a glutton and drunkard. You don’t care about God’s Kingdom. You care only about spearing those who challenge your self-righteousness and your lovelessness. But for me and the people who love me we’re going to have a good time. You’re welcome to come to the party too.”

Wine is God’s gift that gladdens the human heart. When our Lord insists, wine cup in hand, that he is the true vine, the wine of life, he means that he is that gift of the Father who profoundly makes the human heart to sing. Whenever we drink wine, therefore—at the Lord’s Supper, at a meal, on any occasion—we are announcing once again that Jesus Christ is the one who profoundly delights and satisfies, doing for us what no one else can and imparting to us what no one can ever take away.

Since our Lord most profoundly gladdens us through the blessing of his shed blood, the apostles, together with the church after them, have associated wine with blood. In fact the church hasn’t hesitated to speak of eating Christ’s body and drinking his blood. This isn’t surprising, since Jesus himself said that he abides in us and we in him only as we drink his blood.

What did he mean? What did he mean, in view of the fact that Jewish people abhor drinking blood as they abhor little else? The Torah forbids them to drink blood, and they take such precautions with kosher meat as to ensure that they don’t eat or drink blood. At the last supper, when Jesus took the cup and declared to the disciples, “This is God’s covenant with you renewed in my blood,” the one thing that his disciples never thought they were doing was literally drinking his blood. The thought of it would have sickened them.

It so happens that among the Israelite people to “shed blood” meant to murder. Murder was reprehensible. It so happens that among the Israelite people to “drink blood” meant to murder and to profit from the foul deed. While it’s dreadful to murder, it’s worse to murder and then profit from the murder.

When Jesus tells us that we are going to drink his blood, he means that our sin is going to do him in. Humankind’s sin, collapsing on him, will crush him to death. And humankind’s sin, crushing him to death, he will gladly bear and bear away for our sakes, thereby giving us life. We kill, and we profit from it. We shed blood and we drink blood. In the paradoxical mystery of God’s grace, the treachery of the human heart, culminating in murder, the murder of the Son of God; this becomes the means of our forgiveness and freedom. Let me say it again. In the paradoxical mystery of God’s grace, human treachery (the cross) becomes the means whereby human treachery is pardoned and purged.

This is why, during the invitation to the table of our Lord, you hear this text from Psalm 34; “O taste and see that the Lord is good.”