

To Live Wisely

Proverbs 9: 1-6

Psalm 34: 9-14

John 6:51-58

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Proverbs 9: 1-6

Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,
“You that are simple, turn in here!”
To those without sense she says,
“Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”

Psalm 34: 9-14

O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.
The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?
Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.
Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

John 6:51-58

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.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 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. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for 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. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 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.”

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Hocus Pocus. Those two simple rhyming words bring to mind images of magicians, wands and sleight of hand. Although we associate them with magic hats and rabbits, they may have actually originated a very long time ago as a parody, as a response, to the sacramental actions of the early Christian church.

In 1215 The Fourth Lateran Council taught that at consecration the elements of the bread and the wine at communion are replaced by the elements of Christ's actual body and blood. When parishioners would then ask the priest, "But why does the bread and wine still taste like bread and wine and not taste like flesh and blood?" the priest would answer, "It is not essential that it taste like blood or flesh to actually be blood and flesh." Some people of course became skeptical and thought they were not being given a true answer. As a result, "hocus pocus," which means "to trick someone," was derived from the priest's words, in Latin, "hoc est (this is) the body and blood of Christ."

Another probable origin of hocus pocus goes back to the late 1600's. It has been plausibly suggested that hocus-pocus is a corruption of the genuine Latin words *hoc est enim corpus meum*, "for this is my body," spoken during the consecration of the Roman Catholic Mass when the wine and wafer are said to be transformed into the body and blood of Christ. For those misunderstanding-- or those seeking to mock this belief as cannibalism and ridicule the priests-- they would write it off as a deceptive magic trick, or hocus pocus, as by an incantation these words had the power to truly transform bread and wine into divine flesh and blood.

We no longer think that our Catholic faith cousins celebrate Communion by incantations and magic words, yet when we hear Jesus' words that he is the living bread that came down from heaven, and that we are to eat his flesh as true food and to drink his blood as true drink so that we may abide in him for eternal life, we are not quite sure what to make of those words either.

Jesus' invitation is not hocus pocus, nor is it macabre. Jesus' invitation is one of ultimate intimacy and promises. To understand what Jesus is offering is to understand who Jesus is. To eat of the living bread, to drink of the life force that flows through him, is to live wisely and faithfully as he came to feed the world for all time. Jesus sustains us, draws us closer than close. We receive life from Jesus, God incarnate.

This is certainly one passage for which I am especially appreciative of the UCC understanding for reading the bible: We take the Bible seriously but not literally. We believe in the Bible so much that we think it deserves our best questions. We believe that the Bible is the opening of a conversation in which God is still speaking.

And so we ask, what does it mean for us to eat and drink the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ so that we are intimately nourished by his abiding promises? How do we experience the true flesh and blood of Jesus as abundant spiritual food to live wisely?

Let's back up a little bit here from this one essential and critical passage to think of John's Gospel overall, as one thing that John encourages us to not only see but to embrace is God's wisdom, as it is by God's wisdom that we may have intimacy, a deep connection and pure confidence with Jesus. God's wisdom is not about knowledge to be explained and understood as much it is truly relationship to be trusted and embraced. Defining Wisdom as Jesus was a key strategy for the favorite disciple to emphasize the truth that Jesus was Wisdom -and the Word- the very means of redemption, of forgiveness, of eternal life.

John, the longest-surviving of the disciples, painted in his Gospel a portrait of Jesus that showed the depth of years of reflection on who Jesus is and what he means to the world. John describes Jesus as the incarnate Word, the divine Logos, the embodiment of all truth and wisdom.

From the opening verses in the Gospel of John we know that the Word, the Son, became flesh.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

In the life story of Jesus Christ we have something unheard of in all the history of humanity and in religion: The Creator God comes to earth as a human being, comes as a revelation of God, to live among us, to teach us, to live for us, to die for us, to rise for us. Jesus declared, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," so that knowledge and wisdom of God comes through the person, words and works of Jesus.

When we can see Jesus as Wisdom that nourishes the soul, that calls us from the Wisdom before creation, to "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed," to "lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight," we can live wisely with Jesus since, as biblical commentator Craig A. Satterlee wrote, "eternal life does not come through understanding correctly or believing the right things. Eternal life is being in close communion with Jesus. Eternal life is to remain *in* Jesus and to have Jesus remain *in* us. We take Christ's body and blood into our mouths, into our stomachs, into our bodies, so that Christ remains in us and we remain in Christ. As we eat and drink, Christ moves us closer to himself. Christ moves us closer to the very life of God. Christ moves us closer to himself, so close that we are as intimate with Jesus as the Father is with the Son."

This is what it means for us to eat and drink the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ so that we are intimately nourished by his abiding promises. This is how we experience the true flesh and blood of Jesus as abundant spiritual food to live wisely.

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for 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.

Do you hear Jesus' promises? He is not explaining, but intimately promising how, intimately promising why, we who follow him so closely, so intimately, are joined together. Jesus promises that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood, has eternal life now and will be raised up on the last day. Jesus promises to nourish the world with the gift of himself. For the "flesh" and "blood" of Jesus, his incarnate life and very real death on the cross, is life-giving food for us and for the world. In, with and through Jesus, the living bread and life giving cup, we taste where our strength and sustenance comes from, both physically and spiritually, now and eternally.

There is no hocus pocus, no trickery, no word play, when we eat the flesh and blood of Christ we live wisely, we have no want. We know to keep our tongues from evil, and our lips from speaking deceit. We depart from evil, and do good; we seek peace, and pursue it. We dwell in Christ and his promises. Thanks be God, Amen.