

Holy Flesh

Aug 18 Rev Jen Crompton

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Holy One. Amen.

Today we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the ordination of Women to the Priesthood in The Episcopal Church. We've had a long history of women clergy serving here at St. Benedict's.

The ability of women to live out their full call as Priests in The Episcopal Church was an important step towards the open and inclusive church we have become and continue to work towards.

I remain grateful to all those who came before and allowed me to serve my call to the Priesthood so fully myself.

I remember being a child at church, wanting so badly to help with service. Where I lived, only boys could be acolytes. Girls could join the altar guild when they were old enough, yet it was clear that service in the church was gendered. That always felt off because everyone was welcome at the altar rail, where

we were all equal. Men and women were served together just like children and adults.

I liked communion. It was the time when everyone was on the same level.

It would be a long time before I met my first female pastor in college and much longer until I met my first female Episcopal Priest. I don't know that I really understood the importance of seeing someone like me at the altar until I was questioning if I was being called to the Priesthood.

Having to answer the questions, why me? What I have to offer God, and these people is much harder when you've not experienced someone like you in that space. Finding mentors is more limited, and you can feel isolated if you don't have a community supporting you.

Finding the thing that grounds you and centers you becomes crucial to your journey. For me and many of my colleagues, it always came back to our faith, the Eucharist, and our call to share that with others.

In our gospel for today we continue our Bread of Life discourse. In this segment, we see more clearly that Jesus is serious about his message of life and death and the enfleshment

of that message. At the beginning of John, we heard that Jesus was the word made flesh; now we get a more in-depth picture of what that means.

As we dig into our text, it might help us to understand some perspectives of the metaphors in our text. In some of the commentaries I read for this week, some understood eating as “believing in” and drinking as “coming to”. Which help us put what might seem like a very troubling text in perspective.

So as Jesus offers his invitation to eat of his flesh and drink of his blood.

The invitation might be to believe in and come to Jesus through this intimate act of eating and drinking of Jesus. Through participating in this, one would abide in Jesus, and Christ would abide in the one who has eaten and drunk of Christ’s body and blood. And with this, one will live forever.

As Jesus alludes to at the beginning of the text this eternal life comes through his sacrifice on the cross as he says he will give his flesh for the life of the world.

According to the Book of Common Prayer “Christ’s sacrifice is made present by the eucharist, and in it we are united to his one self-offering.” (BCP p.859)

As Episcopalians, we believe in the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which we receive by faith. The presence of Christ is also known in our gathered community.

This text can help us deepen our own relationship with what it means to be a Eucharistic Community.

What does it really mean for Christ to abide in us? For us to abide in Christ?

To listen for that deep love of God and to follow the path Christ has set before us, knowing that to believe in and come to Christ for us does mean eating the bread and drinking the wine. To take the body and blood of Christ each week as we gather around the table and come together to take, break, and bless in remembrance and thanks.

To know God's love so deeply and feel the peace of Christ as he walks with us in our daily lives as we also do our best to abide with Christ and be with him as well.

Like the women who fought for their call to be ordained, we, too, can find strength at the table.

As these women continued to meet challenge after challenge, their faith and passion for serving at the Altar, blessing the

people, and being of service to their communities in specific ways kept them going.

What does Jesus' invitation to eat and drink mean to us when we leave these doors?

As we prepare for communion today, consider what God may be calling us to. How our participation in these holy gifts shapes and changes us.

The Women who fought for their ordination knew that they were called to celebrate at God's table. To open the door for so many others to follow in their footsteps. To help the church grow and continue growing into the full inclusion that the Gospel calls us to.

The full promise of This Holy Eucharist. Where all are equal. As we say, on Sundays, when we use our Iona-based liturgy. "It is the table of communion with the earth, in which Christ became incarnate. So come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more; you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time; you who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed; Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here." **AMEN**

(From the Iona Abby Eucharistic Prayer).