

“Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.” Amen!

A member of the congregation I served in
Panama City asked me after church on Sunday,
if I’d visit her friend who had only
a few months to live.

“Of course,” I said.
“Tell me about your friend.”

She told me his name was Michael and
he was a member of the Methodist church
there in town but his pastor
(some one reason or another)
wasn’t going to visit him.

I learned that Michael had grown
up in Panama City and (as a child) went
to a Southern Baptist Church.

But in his teenage years it became
apparent to him that he wasn’t really
welcome there.

See, Michael was gay and had known it
for a long time, but still they tried
the suppression tactics that they said

was possible to “change him.”

But you and I know, that isn't possible and
shouldn't be done because
God created Michael.

So, thankfully Michael found a Methodist church
that wasn't so outright hostile toward him.

So he joined and attended Sunday worship,
played and sang in their contemporary band,
for something like 10 years,
until his diagnosis that his kidneys

were failing and doctors said
it was just a matter of time.

Michael moved into his mother's home
for the remaining months of his life and
I went there to visit him.

As I prepared to leave after that first visit,
we set the date for me to
come back the next week,

and I asked if he'd like me to bring
communion on that visit.

There was this flood of appreciation

that washed over his face as we
set our next day and time.

The next week, when I arrived,
Michael was doing well
(at least for his situation and diagnosis).

When it came time to share in the Lord's Supper,
I explained the process.

I do the same thing even now.

I explain that I'd like to pray for him and
for his mother and hospice caregiver.

Then I asked if there's something
on his heart that I can
include in the prayers.

After that, we will say the Lord's Prayer together,
and with the bread and wine,
I'll say the words of institution

(the "In the night in which he was betrayed...")
and share in the Communion Supper.

It all went smoothly, as far as I can remember,
until Michael threw his head back
to drink of the small cup of wine.

You see, Michael, being from the Baptist tradition,
was expecting grape juice and the wine
Messiah used for communion.

It was Mogen David Concord Red.

Ah, you know where this is going!

Even the seasoned wine drinker
feels Mogen David wine all the way down
the throat.

So, to say he was shocked would
be an understatement!

It was then I realized that for my next visit to Michael,
I needed to bring grape juice!

In the remaining months of visits and
communion meals with Michael,

we'd often recall that first experience of
the Lord's Supper together and
share a laugh. (Pause)

That experience literally showed me
the repulsion that is natural in all of us
when it comes to the words about

drinking blood or eating flesh.

This wine (and grape juice) is blood,
but it's also not blood!

The bread isn't flesh, yet it is Jesus' flesh.

It's part of the mystery of faith that
revolves around our journeys in the same way
we revolve around the rail.

Yearning for the life bread and sacred drink,
that Jesus offered to the crowd that day, long ago.

Jesus institutes here the sacrament that
we continue to partake in thousands of years later.

Was Jesus foreseeing us,
whether kneeling or standing,
with hand open and tiny glass?

Mmm, probably not.

He was more likely talking about larger meals,
like potluck suppers or banquet meals,

where everyone came and where
everyone brought something.

Those who were more well-to-do,
brought the more hearty foods and those
who had fewer resources brought the
smaller things from a garden.

Everyone was welcome even if
they could only bring water,
but it was something,
and it was enough.

Jesus spoke of knitting people together
around these meals.

As Jesus spoke to this community of people
around him he used shocking language.

People were repulsed.

The retelling by John uses the same language
that even stops us in our tracks, but
Jesus had been doing such a thing all along
in John's account.

Nicodemus was shocked at Jesus' command
to be "born again."

The woman at the well was misunderstanding
Jesus when he spoke about the water of life
and she said,

“Sir, you don’t even have a bucket!”

The crowd now is aghast as Jesus
speaks of people eating His flesh and
drinking His blood.

I even get a little gag! :-)

But Jesus used this language to invite us
into discerning a deeper meaning about Himself.

He clarified to the crowd that was looking
for a free meal, to glimpse the truth that he is...
the “free meal.”

The free meal provided by God.

That his body is the “life bread” because
he’s going to offer his whole self for the world.

Jesus offers His body, that’s his flesh, and
he offers his life force, that’s his blood,
to the crowd.

Some believed, some didn’t, and many,
many more, were probably in between
just wondering how it can all be? (Pause)

I haven't said it in a while but I used
to say this all the time.

We need to "chew of Jesus."

You remember the expression,
"We sat around chewing the fat."

What does that mean? (Talking, engaging in
conversation, reminiscing,
perhaps most important, listening.)

Yes! It doesn't mean carving off some fat
from the steak and sitting in a circle
with people to chew it!

"Chewing on Jesus," doesn't mean we literally eat
him, but it does mean He stays with us and we
meditate on His ways... over and
over and over, again.

Is that a way we participate with Jesus these days?

I think so.

Gathering around to eat meals together,
chewing the fat, (chewing on Jesus) and
then taking those practices from in here...
into our daily living, out there.

AMEN!