15th Sunday after Pentecost

**Partaking in the Life of Jesus**

John 6:53-58 / September 5, 2021

 **1.**

 Today I’d like to talk about Holy Communion. In the United Methodist Church, we usually have a Holy Communion Service once a month, on the first or second Sunday of each month. But some churches hold Holy Communion during important seasons such as Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas in addition to the monthly communion, and others offer Holy Communion in healing services every week. Although Holy Communion has not been held during the Pandemic period due to the coronavirus, it is so important that it is the core of worship and the Christian community.

 Then, let’s think about this. Why do we, as Christians, celebrate the holy sacraments at least once a month or each and every week? Why is it so significant that in Christian worship right at the center is Holy Communion–the Lord’s Supper–the Eucharist? Or let me ask this way. Why do we partake in the bread and wine? Well, I think this is an important question and so it is worth thinking about once again the meaning and significance of Holy Communion.

 On that night, being aware of his approaching death, Jesus shared a farewell meal with his disciples. In this sacred meal, Jesus took ordinary table bread and wine, gave thanks to God, beseeched God to bless it, and distributed it with these words: “This bread is my body. This wine is my blood. Every time you eat this bread and drink this wine in my name, I will be present with you.”

 And, so it is for people of faith. Ordinary bread and wine become, by the grace of God, the body and blood of Christ. In this timeless, eternal food, the Christ of faith is present with us. How does that happen, exactly? We don’t know. It’s holy mystery. We cannot fully understand how that happens, and I think that’s why many Christians have their own ideas and opinions, and churches have their own theories.

 **2.**

 The Roman Catholics believe that during the ceremony of the Mass, the bread and wine are “changed” into the real body and blood of Christ, even though the elements appear to remain the same. The Lutherans have a similar theory. They believe that in the communion, the body and blood of Christ, and the bread and wine, “coexist” in union with each other, without changing each other.

 While both Catholics and Lutherans emphasize the real bodily presence of Jesus on the elements, in our Methodist Church, we follow the Wesleyan tradition that don’t agree with the idea of the bodily presence of Christ. We believe as we receive Holy Communion, we experience Jesus is really present as a spiritual presence that conveys God’s grace into our soul.

 No matter how “the presence of Jesus” in Holy Communion is understood, the core of the issue is this: through partaking in the bread and wine, we come to enter into communion with Jesus Christ. That’s what Jesus says in today’s gospel lesson: **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remain in me, I in him.” (John 6:56)**

 What does this mean? It means we meet Jesus who comes close to us, who comes into our hearts, touches us, and feeds our souls. It is in the partaking of the bread and cup that we experience Jesus, who wants to give all that he has and fill our deepest needs. If we approach the table prayerfully and receive the bread and cup, truly letting Jesus touch us, we will experience healing, change, or transformation to take place.

 **3.**

 Theodore Dobson, who was a priest and writer, once shared his story of how he experienced transformation through Holy Communion. He had a difficult relationship with an elderly colleague; they were always on opposite sides of any issue. They had a particularly angry discussion just before Dobson went off to a conference.

 Then soon after he returned, he was at Mass when the other priest was presiding. During the celebration he felt all his negative feelings about this priest rising up within him. At the presentation of gifts he kneaded into the bread the angry words he had used towards this man. He poured into the cup his negative feelings of hurt and anger and he asked forgiveness.

 As the bread and wine entered his body, he felt the infinite grace of Jesus, who loved and forgave him unconditionally, filled his soul. At that moment, he asked the Lord to let him know how he could find a way to be reconciled with his colleague. Sometime later he noticed this priest was having difficulty climbing some stairs because of his weak heart. Dobson asked if he could help and the other man allowed Dobson to assist him. That was the beginning of a happier relationship.

 **4.**

 Transformation is the heart of the mystery of Holy Communion, and it takes place when we move into “communion” with Christ. But that’s not the end. Authentic communion with Christ will lead to a commitment to Christ. What I mean by that is whenever we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are invited to partake and share in the life of Jesus. We are called to re-present his life, his compassionate life, in our time and place.

 You see, wherever we are, wherever we go, there is always the suffering of people around us: the suffering of those who feel isolated from family and friends, the suffering of the people who lack caring friends, satisfying work, a peaceful home, the suffering of the millions who feel lonely, the suffering of the poor, the homeless, the dying…. As the people who have partaken in the bread and cup, what we are called to do is to be present with those hurting people in the midst of their suffering. There we listen to them, touch them, and share their sufferings.

 Everyone, Holy Communion is the heart and center of being-the-church. Without it there is no people of God, no community of faith, no church. In this Holy Communion, we affirm our unity by eating the one bread and drinking the one wine of Jesus Christ. That is the foundation of the church. And, in this Holy Communion, we meet Jesus who gives us his body and blood as gifts that help us to find the way of love in our own lives. I hope that you will become partakers in the life of Jesus. <Amen>