

Text: Exodus 16:1-7 (Bread from Heaven)

Title: "Divine Cannibalism"

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Passage (NRSV)

1Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.

2The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

3The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

4Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.

5"On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily."

6So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt;

7and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?"

Prayer:

Father, Here I stand, as a minority among minorities.

I know that you always speak through a marginalized, from outside to inside majority.

So we thank you for our marginality.

Speak through me, Lord. Use my crippled English to reveal what is the true bread from heaven that satisfies our real hunger. Amen

Our human body cannot function without food.

we can survive for a couple of days without food, maybe a week, or for a month without food in extreme circumstances. But eventually our body will go back to dust without food.

Listen to the passage again carefully,

(Verse 3) The Israelites said to them, 'if only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread for you have brought

us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

They were scared. They could easily imagine they would all starve to death in the wilderness.

"Freedom from the captivity? the Promised Land with milk and honey? Forget it. There is nothing to eat here. We are all going to starve to death here.

I cannot blame them. If I were in their shoes, I would probably said the same thing. There is no one who can overcome the hunger.

No wonder Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread."

But can we, you and I, really pray the 4th petition of the Lord's Prayer?

We already have too much food. We see left over foods being wasted everyday in MacKay cafeteria. Go to Wegman, the Wholefood Market... we are surrounded abundantly with all the best foods in the world. With the money, we can have them in our possession any time we want. So often at the Miller chapel, when we close the worship with the Lord's Prayer, I feel like we should say, "Lord, the fourth petition is already taken care of so let us skip it and jump to the forgiveness part.

It is difficult for us to imagine how desperate it is to be without food.

However, we know that there are still people on this planet, a lot more than we can imagine, who are starving to death. Death because of no food!!! Can you imagine that?

Among the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer, they would want to skip all other five petitions and desperately pray the 4th petition only, over and over everyday.

"Lord, we don't know how and where to get the next meal. So give us this day our daily food."

I went to North Korea four times. I wanted to help the young orphans there starving and waiting only for their turns to turn into dust. In 2005, I fundraised 13,000 dollars and bought 20 tons of flour from China and took it into North Korea. 20 tons of flour can then be made into breads and feed 3,000 children for a month, only for a month!

Before I crossed the border I heard from Chinese people that there were cannibalism going on in North Korea. I did not believe it. But after being there seeing what is going on with my own eyes, I believe it is plausible. Can a human being eat someone else's flesh because they are desperately hungry? Yes, it is possible. and it happens in many places.

It can happen in Tokyo, Paris, and in New York City if the conditions are met.

So now what does God say to this hungry planet?

Let's go back to the text.

To the grumbling cry of Israelites, God says, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you." (verse 4)

Strange, is it not?

Bread from Heaven? What in the world is this bread from heaven?

We know that all foods come from the earth: tomatoes, potatoes, corn, beef, chicken... They grow out of earth. They come from bottom up. But this food, called Manna, is to come from heaven, from up down.

But the sweet Manna from Heaven could not satisfy the taste buds of Israelites.

They grumbled that they sat by the fleshpots and ate their fill of bread but they never ate the meat and bread to the full when they were in Egypt. They are just wish dreaming. Their hunger was never satisfied. The fact that they were grumbling even after the Manna was given shows that their sense of taste was distorted and addicted to the wrong food for 400 years of captivity in Egypt. They no longer could tell which is bread of heaven and bread of captivity. Their definition of food was only something they can chew so it can refuel their physical energy to build dead Pharaoh's Pyramid, or Pharaoh's palace, or Princess's bath-tub for the day.

They had no idea what it meant to live by the bread from heaven.

Was the Manna merely an emergency food for the Israelites in the wilderness?

The bread from heaven has much more profound meaning.

The long forgotten Manna is reminded again through the lips of our Lord, Jesus.

John 6:48-58 (NIV)

Listen to this amazing testimony of our Lord,

I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. (Listen to this!) This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, (Listen now!) unless you eat the flesh of the Son

of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who continues to eat me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

What more do I need to say?

This is what communion is about. Eating Jesus. Chew his body, drink his blood. But how bizarre!

"Take and eat, this raw muscle, this meat dripping with blood, this is my body given for you. Eat it!

Take and drink, this crimson red, so rich liquid, this is my blood given for you. Drink it!"

Oh, divine cannibalism!

Strangely, the bizarreness sustains our life!

(verse 50), "Eat and not die."

"Eat and not die."

Ring a bell for you?

God says in Genesis 3: "You shall not eat from it or you will surely die."

but the serpent distorts it and says, "You may eat it and not die."

But listen to what Jesus says, "Here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die."

You see what Jesus is doing here?

He is healing us by becoming our food!

Another one.

"Take and Eat"

"Take and Eat"

Does it ring a bell for you? Does it remind you of something?

Genesis 3:6, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a de-

light to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Oh, the cursed verbs, "took and ate,"

That is where our taste buds began to go wrong. We chose wrong food.

Now, do you see what Jesus is doing?

Now in Jesus lips, "Take..... and Eat, ...this is my body and blood given for you."

It gives me shiver as I see Jesus hanging on the tree is hanging as a fruit of the 'Tree of Life' that we abandoned and have long forgotten.

He is hanging on the cross as if giving us second chance. Take and Eat me this time. I am the true food you are created to eat. Take and Eat and Not die!

On the cross, he is healing us. He restores our distorted taste buds.

No wonder the only one question that the North Koreans asked me, when I entered their border, was "Are you bringing a Bible?"

Of course they asked me the question because they prohibited the Bible coming in to their country.

But I heard it as if they were saying,

"Are you bringing us the Bible? It is the only true food that we need more than the 20 tons of flour bread."

We need Jesus more than we need our next meal.

We are not to live on our bread alone but by eating the word of God. the Logos, the true word incarnate, Jesus, our Lord.

Application

Now then, what does it mean to eat Jesus?

That means he satisfies our greatest desire.

Money, fame, church growth, sex, power, influence... They are all wrong foods to seek after. Let us not accustom our taste buds to such things.

Brothers and Sisters,

The blessed verbs "Take and Eat"

Take and Eat him, and digest him. and through this mystical digestive process, called sanctification, we become like him.

Make his flesh and blood my flesh and blood.

You and I, we need Jesus more than our next meal.

Is Jesus in you? Are you eating Jesus everyday?

If not, what are we doing here? What are we celebrating here?

Princeton Theological Seminary, all the theology books and papers we read and write, certain distinctive style of preaching, Karl Barth, and even Dr. King..., they are all appetizers!

We cannot live on appetizers. The goal of appetizers are to stimulate our appetites.

But the taste sensation of our tongue is easily capable of distortion. We are easily capable of being satisfied with appetizers themselves.

But brothers and sisters,

only Jesus is our main dish. His body and His blood is our hard food, that gives us true strength, and sustains our lives.

Thank God, you and I, we don't have to skip the 4th petition of the Lord's Prayer. but now we can pray the prayer saying,

"Lord, give us this day Jesus. We need him more than our next meal." Amen.