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John 6:56-69

"The time has come," the Walrus said,  
"To talk of many things:  
Of shoes – and ships – and sealing-wax –  
Of cabbages – and kings –  
And why the sea is boiling hot –  
And whether pigs have wings."

I don't know why, but that bit of verse from *Alice's Adventures through the Looking Glass* has always stuck with me. It is from a poem called "The Walrus and the Carpenter." The time has come to talk about, well, not cabbages and kings so much, but about our readings from the Gospel of John we've been having the last few weeks. I've put off talking about them because they overlap so that I wanted to just talk about it once, rather than bore you with three weeks of the same thing.

Some context. This is from the sixth chapter of John. The whole chapter is structured around the miracle, or sign, of the feeding of the five thousand. From that jumping off point, our Lord Christ has expounded on the motif of bread. I am the bread of life. I am the bread that came down from heaven. The responses have been varied – wonder, perplexity, outrage, disgust. Jesus lost many disciples that day because of his teaching.

It is a problem the Church has had for two thousand years – people turning away from teachings that seem too difficult. The idea of eating flesh and wine, drinking blood, even metaphorically, was too much for many of the first disciples. Two thousand years of Christianity have softened the blow a bit. Few turn their backs on Christianity because of our Eucharistic theology. There are many denominations that down-play the whole body and blood thing. For them, the Eucharist is more symbolic, an ordinance rather than a sacrament. Something you do rather than something that imparts any kind of grace.

On the more Catholic end of the spectrum, many churches do celebrate the sacramental nature of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Somehow the bread and wine do become in some way the body and blood of Jesus. In the Anglican tradition, we proclaim the reality without trying to explain it. For us, it just is.

No, it is not our Eucharistic theology that turns some people off. But there are teachings of our Lord Christ that some folks today have trouble accepting. That whole "love your enemies" thing, for example. We don't want to love our enemies; we want to bomb them into submission, then make friends of them. That's not the way it works. We are to show kindness and compassion even to those who hate us. At least, that is what Jesus said to do. Does that mean that there should be no

consequences for evil done? No, but it does mean that violence should not be our first approach. "Use your words," we tell our children. The same applies to adults.

But that's so difficult. It is so much easier to take to social media to express our displeasure than to confront another person directly. Even though that confrontation is exactly what we are commanded to do, not to start a fight, but to work toward reconciliation. After all, God didn't write off humanity when we messed up. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. "When we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, [God], in [his] mercy, sent Jesus Christ, [his] only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to [him], the God and Father of all." (BCP 362) The breaking of the relationship was not the time to end the relationship, but to make it new.

We are called to do the same thing in our lives. "You don't understand. Some hurts are too deep to heal." It's true, some relationships are so damaged as to be unsalvageable this side of the grave. Sometimes the best that can be done is to end the relationship. But that doesn't mean that hatred and malice should still dwell in our hearts. We can still forgive. "But I don't feel like forgiving." Here's the thing, forgiveness isn't a feeling; it's an act. If we wait until we feel it, it may never happen. So we can't let that be our excuse. Sometimes the intellect has to overrule the heart in order for forgiveness to take place. "But doesn't that make me a hypocrite if I really don't mean it?" We must forgive in order to feel forgiveness. To borrow a phrase from AA, "Fake it 'til you make it." We aren't to act like the people we are; we act like the people we are called to be. And in doing that, with God's grace, we grow into being the people God created us to be.

And no, it is not easy. That is why it takes the ultimate sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ to even make such reconciliation and transformation possible. That is why we must "eat his flesh and drink his blood." We are striving to be part of God. Sometimes we have to be shocked into recognizing what that means. If two thousand years of repetition have dulled the edge of Jesus' call to us, perhaps it is time to hone our understanding. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for us. In return, we are called to become part of him. We eat his flesh and drink his blood that we "may evermore dwell in him and he in us." We are to become part of God. And we are to make room for God to be part of us. The Eucharist is more than a symbol of that act; it is the carrying out of it.

We gather here on Sundays to worship God and to gather at his altar in order to make our Lord Jesus Christ a part of our very being. Then we go into the world to be Christ to the world. We eat the true bread of heaven that gives us eternal life in him who dies for us. If becoming one with the God and Father of all has become routine, then we are doing it wrong. We should celebrate each Eucharist as if it were our first one, our last one, our only one. It's an awful lot to ask from a wafer of bread and a sip of wine, but that is the power of the presence of Christ. Even something this simple is that profound.

Our Lord gave us many difficult teachings – love your enemies, bless those who persecute you, feed the hungry, heal the sick, clothe the naked, eat his flesh and drink his blood, take up our cross and follow him. We are asked the same question as Simon Peter was that day so long ago, “Do you wish to go away?” May God grant us the grace that our answer would be like his: “There is nowhere else to go. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*