**We Are Beggars**

Based on [John 6:51-69](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn6.51-69)

Preached on August 16, 2015

Pentecost 12, Proper 15

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Today I would like to explain to you the Mystery of the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, the Eucharist if you like. St. Paul speaks this way in 1 Corinthians of those who are called to the Office of the Holy Ministry. “**This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and *stewards of the mysteries* of God**.” That’s what the Bible call the truths of the Christian faith…mysteries. Mysteries are not secrets. A secret, when it’s revealed, is no longer a secret. But a mystery remains a mystery even after you explain it, because it’s from God, and we take it by faith.

And what Jesus teaches today is this, “**Unless you eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink his blood, you have no *life* in you.”** And this promise of encouragement, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal *life*, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Jesus promises that eating and he even goes one step further, “feeding upon” his flesh gives *life*.

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they died. For the past couple weeks, Jesus has been saying that he is the living bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread your fathers ate and *died*.*"* Jesus came to conquer death and that means he brings life. What is this life?

Life is more than a beating heart. When someone is on life support, they are artificially fed to keep their heart beating, but if their brain is dead we say they are a vegetable and nobody rejoices. Nobody says, "**Isn't it wonderful this person is still alive!**" No, we pray and mourn and lament the tragedy. The point is they are for all practical purposes dead, brain dead, and yet they still have life in them. Blind people have dead eyes, paralyzed people have dead limbs. Standing water is dead water, but the Bible calls running water "living water" because it moves (Genesis 26:19). Death means motionless, inactive, and stagnant.

But that doesn't get to the bottom of life either. There's a TV show called the Walking Dead, it's the opposite. Dead people move around, are animated. They are portrayed as alive and even hungry and yet there is no life in them, just *soulless* motion and hunger. **A machine can move, we don't say it has life, at least not while being literal about it.** If a husband tells his wife he loves her, or if he gives her flowers on their anniversary, but the love is not really there, we'd say he's "**just going through the motions."** So too with God. For James says in Chapter two, “**Just as the Body without the Spirit is Dead, So faith without works is dead**.” God saves us by faith without any activity on our part; but faith is not dead but living. Faith moves, faith gives life and life moves. And yet life is more than just going through the motions.

And so the old cliché remains true, “life is a mystery” because it is a gift from God alone. We can explain life, but we can never explain it away. In 1 Timothy 6:13, Paul writes to Timothy saying, "**I charge you in the presence of God, who gives *life* to all things.**" We confess in the Nicene Creed that God the Holy Spirit, is "the Lord and giver of life." Hebrews 4:12 says, "**For the word of God is living and active.**" And Jesus' own words today, "As the *living* Father sent me, and I *live* because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me he also will *live* because of me."

Only God is the source of life, only he can give it, and only he can take it away. Jesus says, "**Fear not the one who kill the body, but He who can destroy both the body and the soul in hell**" (Matthew 10:28). That's God. Body and soul together, healthy, fully functional, that's life and only God can do that, give that and only he can give it eternally. And here's what Jesus says, "**The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh**." The source of eternal life for sinful man is in the flesh of Jesus, which is why, 1 John 4:3 advises Christians**, “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is from God**.” The flesh of Jesus gives life and so Jesus says to Martha, “**I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”**

An illustration. I remember somebody posing this question before and I'll ask it to you. **Do you know what a refrigerator is, you know the one in your home with the freezer and everything?** What is its purpose? It's a morgue. It's a morgue. It keeps dead things cold so that they don't waste away or rot. It keeps dead things cold so that, we can preserve the energy left in them and at the proper time we can consume them. Meat and vegetables, organic living things. You see, we preserve our life by eating dead things, and we call it nutrition, and nourishment. It's barbaric isn't it? Imagine an alien race that had never heard of eating anything, how ridiculous and gross it would be for them to see eating, feeding how we live by feeding on the life of other things.

And so Jesus says, "**I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst**." "Whoever eats of this bread will have life forever, and **the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.**" "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood *you have no life in you*."

Friends, our eternal life comes exclusively from the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, whose body was nailed to a cross, and his blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins. It seems brutal and barbaric---it is. And Jesus says, by my death you live. “Make no mistake have no airs about you; you will survive unto eternal life because I died, and the life that is in me I give to you to eat and to drink to nourish you and to sustain you body and soul unto life everlasting.” “**For my flesh is true food; and my blood is true drink.**” We are beggars, we cannot save ourselves, we need the life of Jesus to live.

Jesus taught these things in Capernaum, and when many of his disciples heard it, they said, “**This is a hard teaching, who can listen to it?**” And they took offense at his words. And after this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. Why? Why would people who followed Jesus leave him at these words? Well, it’s easy to think that his words are just plain offensive and crude. I remember hearing from a friend how, when her son had brought a friend to church, he was scandalized by what was said. That we eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus. What are these people…cannibals? And I think that’s the sense we get, is that the disciples who left though, “Eat your flesh Jesus, eeeew, gross.”

That can certainly make people stumble, but eating Jesus flesh isn’t the stumbling block here. What makes his disciples leave is the scandal that this flesh and blood man is saying we somehow need him/his flesh in order to be right with God. That we need his flesh in order to live…that, when it comes down to it, that we cannot sustain ourselves, live or die by our own efforts and choices, but that we are beggars, and we are left at the mercy of this man Jesus to live.

Friends that is the scandal, that is the stumbling block that keeps people from coming to Jesus. It’s the idea that I owe my life to somebody else; that I am at the mercy of somebody whom my heart might not agree with. That I live because it pleased God to give me life and preserve it, and I have no right to have it apart from him. Well in that case I’ll just go someplace else.

Jesus fed more than five thousand people miraculously with two fish and five loaves of bread. In their eyes he became the bread king and they followed him around. And Jesus says, “You followed me, not because you saw the signs I did, but because you ate the bread and had your fill.” As long as Jesus is handing out free bread, we’ll follow him around. But the minute you says, “You need my bread,” that’s when their heart hardens.

An illustration: if you go into a restaurant and order some food, you might compliment the chef and the service. It might be the best meal you’ve ever had at an unbeatable price. You’ll go there again and again so long as they serve you and you can leave and go about your business. But the minute the chef would say, you need me and you are at my mercy, and if you don’t eat the food I give, you have nothing. You would think, “What an arrogant man. Sure his food is good, but does he really think he’s the only chef in town?” And you would leave out of rebellion and protest and spite.

It’s the same today, and in Jesus time. If you tell someone to come the body and blood of Christ because they *need* it, it isn’t taken well. But if you tell someone to come to church because they’ll enjoy it, because it’s fun, because there are good caring people here; you won’t really offend anybody. People will come and get along nicely. Say “come to our church because you need it, or come to our church because you have no life apart from it” many will not enter the door from pride, or will leave offended. And yet that’s what Jesus says, “You need me”, and they say, but aren’t you Joseph’s son? You even admit you’re flesh and blood just like me, a man and now you say I need you. Thanks but no thanks. I’ll go find other food. I’ll go find another teacher who says I can do it all myself and already have all I really need in my self.

Jesus says, Do you take offense at this?…Then what if you were to see the son of man ascending to where he was before? That’s why we know it’s not just the vulgarity of the teaching here, Jesus is saying that what really offends you is that me, a flesh and blood man is the one who is responsible for your life and salvation. This is the scandal, we ask people to worship a man. The scandal is you are told to believe a man rules heaven and hearth, and he is God, to believe that a man runs the universe and a man gives us men life.

Now a mystery remains a mystery even after it’s revealed. There was more to be revealed about the Lord’s Supper, Jesus never does answer the question of *how* he will give his flesh and blood to eat; until the night of his betrayal, when he says “This bread is my body; and this cup is my blood.” And I bet the disciples when they heard this were relieved that he gives his flesh in bread, and not in “raw steak form” as it were. That he puts his life giving blood under wine to give it to us. But the point is that the disciples who stayed with Jesus didn’t know this. But they stayed anyway, why? Because the “how” of what Jesus said wasn’t important, but the fact that Jesus was saying it. The words came from him, therefore they are true whether we understand their full implication or not, for we walk by faith and not sight. We believe in the power of this meal not because bread and wine are so special, but because Jesus makes it Spiritual food. Spirit giving, life giving from the source of life Himself for us to eat and to drink and to have life.

We are beggars, we need that meal. That doesn’t help our pride, but it’s certainly the truth from the words of God himself. So we resound with Peter, and with the disciples who stayed with Jesus. When Jesus puts forward things that we can’t wrap our minds around, we say what? Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We need you, We are beggars.

You need what Jesus gives at this altar, his table, his life giving body and blood. But that’s nothing to be resentful of. Come, eat, receive the life that God gives us there. And we will walk in the newness of life, for the flesh and blood of Christ gives what he promises.