

The Fleshy Love of Jesus

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

For the past few weeks we have heard many pericopes, or short sections, of this chapter of John in which Jesus speaks about being the “bread of life”

He really ups his game this week with this text - we’re no longer in the land of pretty metaphor - Jesus is now in the synagogue teaching his disciples and you can almost imagine him pointing to his real, fleshy body saying “Those who eat my flesh” this flesh “and drink my blood,” this blood that runs through my veins, “will have eternal life”

And it freaked them out!

This scandalized many who heard it, as John tells us, and I would imagine that the more I keep saying “flesh” there’s something in many of you that twinges just a little bit as it did for me as I read this passage over and over in preparation for this morning.

There’s something queer about this invitation from Jesus to eat him - or as many scholars translate the text - gnaw on his flesh

And, there’s something erotic in this invitation from Jesus - the sensuality and intimacy of taking Jesus’ body into our mouths with a desire for closeness, fulfillment, eternal ecstasy

You know, in my work, I hear many LGBTQIA+ pastors, deacons, and candidates say “my congregation is afraid that I’m only going to preach about queer things and sex”...well, this morning I’m going to preach about

the queer things and sex, but, in my defense, Jesus started it this morning with this fleshy text

There is something deeply powerful - holy really - in engaging the emotions, feelings, and sensations of our fleshy humanness - emotions, feelings, and sensations that Jesus knew in his own fleshy, human body

Jesus' invitation to eat his flesh and drink his blood IS an erotic invitation and it is scandalous and it is transformational - thanks be to God

It is OK to see the erotic in Jesus' invitation to take his flesh into our bodies, because when we take one's flesh into our bodies there IS often a deeply physical, emotional, and spiritual connection

And, it's OK to connect Jesus' invitation to human sexuality because Jesus is connecting to us as one very human, fleshy person to other very human, fleshy people - making his ministry very real

For far too long, it was taught in our churches, schools, and society that our sexuality is what makes queer people different from straight people - but it's wildly the opposite

Our needs for sexual, sensual, and emotional connections to other people is EXACTLY what bonds us one to another and makes us wildly similar if not the same, fleshy humanity

Connecting Jesus' words to take in his flesh to our sexuality and sensuality reminds us that we are, all of us, deeply connected as that humanity God created and so deeply loves - we are all that Body of Christ

And, making connections to human sexuality in Jesus' offer to take in his flesh causes us to feel emotions, feelings, twinges of comfort and discomfort that re-awakens the power of the erotic in each of us

Audre Lorde - the great black, lesbian, feminist author and scholar, helped to open my eyes to this power in her essay "Uses of the Erotic - The Erotic as Power" from 1978

She talks about the erotic as a power source available within each of us that is deeply connected to our feeling

It is a source of power that has been oppressed as a means of patriarchy and, I would argue, the anti-queerness in our society

Erotic power is irrational and illogical - which makes it highly suspicious - AND it is ecstatically generative and deliciously relational

Lorde writes in her essay "This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe."

"As we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within."

"In touch with the erotic," she says, "I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native

to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.”

For me, this helps to illuminate exactly what I believe Jesus is offering to us in his invitation today to “eat his flesh and drink his blood”

In creation - God infused all of us with erotic power - the power generated from our feelings, our guts, our hearts, our emotions, our sexuality and sensuality

And that erotic power has been corrupted and co-opted, constricted and resigned to the margins and called “odd, other, queer”

It is precisely from and to the margins that Jesus so often speaks, and so it should come as no surprise that Jesus offers transformation from this erotic place in his flesh - he offers the re-awakening of erotic power that gives life, eternal life

Each week, our fleshy, human bodies are invited to connect with other human, fleshy bodies at a meal where we take in the flesh of another body

I’m talking about a church people!

Each week, the invitation to take in Jesus’ flesh is offered here at this table, in this space

Each week, we are offered a taste of the love, grace, and mercy offered in this meal that pulls us away from believing we are powerless and feelings of, as Lorde put it, resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial

Instead, Jesus offers his flesh so that we might understand our capacity for joy, love, wholeness

In fact, it has been around this table, at times when this community has felt unloved, resigned, depressed that Jesus' flesh was offered by a lesbian pastor who reminded those who took it in that they could now "live in forgiveness, claim their wholeness, and depart in peace" - I might say "depart in peace and great joy!"

So when we are in this world which suppresses our erotic power and instead consumes ours and others' bodies in unhealthy ways - racism, un-live-able wages, exploitation, frenzied capitalism, transphobia - and which tells us our bodies and existence are of little worth if they're not thin, able-bodied, cisgender, white, heterosexual, etc - Lord, to whom shall we go?

The table is prepared in your midst, all without exception are welcome

"Eat my flesh - drink my blood" take in the great ecstasy of my love, take in the Spirit of compassion and mercy that is present in me and present in you and transforms our hearts, connect to me and in doing so connect to the erotic power God placed in you, feel your feelings, experience joy

The body of Christ, is given to and for you. Come, taste and see that the Lord is good.

- Amen