

Body and Blood

8 4 12

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory.

My text is from Paul's First Letter to the Church at Corinth, chapter 11 verse 27:
'the body and blood of Christ'.

Happy Easter. Here at last. Lent is over. Spring is here. There's the promise of summer to come. Isn't it good to be alive? And life is the central message of Easter. New life in the face of the grave. New life with the possibility of our old life being transformed. New life knowing that this life does not end with death, with our dying. That the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day means that we, in due time, out of time, will be restored to a new life where according to the Book of Revelation, God will dwell among us:

'he will wipe away every tear from our eye.

Death will be no more:

mourning and crying and pain will be no more

for the first things have passed away.' (21 v4)

Today, I'd like to take the opportunity of looking at the heart of our communion service which is my text today: 'the body and blood of Christ'. Now I don't want to rehearse the old arguments about the real presence or absence of Christ in the bread we eat and in the wine we drink. You have your own understanding of the reality of what we are doing. Whether to you, it is purely symbolic or essentially Christ, there is room at our altar rails for all shades of understanding.

But on this Easter morning, what I want to explore, albeit as ever briefly, is how to make sense of what is essentially quite shocking. You must know that the Early Christians were accused of cannibalism - understandable in the circumstances. If we are to be literally minded, then eating the flesh of Christ and drinking his blood does seem quite shocking especially if you were to think about what in this case the words might mean.

But the key understanding our Christian faith often lies in our Jewish roots. The Last Supper, in which our communion service is rooted, was a Passover meal. The bread was unleavened; the wine alcoholic and red. There is the underlying, implicit imagery of a lamb which is killed and whose flesh is eaten. There is the memory that some of the blood of that same lamb is smeared on the lintel of the door to the house where they were eating so that the angel of death might pass over the Jews inside.

So when Jesus breaks the bread and passes round the wine to drink, it is in the context of a meal. Food and drink are two essentials to sustain life. But what is surprising is that Jesus is saying that the bread is his body that will be broken on

the cross and the wine is his blood that will be shed on the cross. Jesus is saying to his Jewish disciples that he is, in some sense, the Pascal lamb; that his body and blood will be given to them, for them, so that they might be delivered from death and have eternal life. So here and now at Easter, we have come full circle, back to the first chapter of John's Gospel to the words of John the Baptist to his disciples on seeing Jesus, '**Behold the Lamb of God**'.

And one last thought. Blood to any Jew was trefah, not kosher. Part of the kosher food laws was in preparing the meat, any blood therein should, as far as possible, be cleaned off, washed from the flesh. Why? Because the blood was considered the life force of the living creature and it was wrong for them to eat the life force. But here, Jesus is saying that not only is he feeding us with the bread and the wine but that because the bread and the wine are essentially his body and blood or symbolic of his body and blood, then we are being fed by his very essence.

And that is why Holy Communion is just that: that we are in fact engaged in a sacred act, being in communion with God because, as Christians, we are being fed by Jesus with his very life force. Awesome or what?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

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H: Sermon 25: Body and blood

