

Corpus Christi

22 6 14

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank you that in this wonderful sacrament
you have given us a memorial of your passion:
grant us so to reverence the sacred mysteries
of your body and your blood
that we may know within ourselves
and show forth within our lives
the fruits of your redemption.

Our text today may be found in John chapter 6 and verse 51:

**'I am the living bread that came down from heaven, says the Lord.
Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.'**

Do you know who first said: 'Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die' ?
By checking it out in my 'Oxford Dictionary of Quotations', I discovered the quotation is actually a combination of two texts from the Bible: one from Luke 12 v19, '**eat, drink, be merry**' and one from Isaiah 22 v13, '**Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.**' Both are rooted in silliness and stupidity: the passage from Luke is from 'The Parable of the Rich Fool' which ends in his sudden, unexpected death; the passage from Isaiah refers to the merrymaking of the Israelites when they should be fasting and mourning and repenting of their wickedness which will ultimately end in exile to Babylon.

But let me ask you three easier questions. Do you like eating ? Do you like drinking ? Do you like to be merry ? I do – all three ! Of course, there is a danger in each. Eat too much you can get fat, obese. Eat too little and you can become anorexic, painfully thin. Drink too much and you can fail a breathalyser; drink too little and you can become dehydrated. Too much merrymaking and no one thinks you're sufficiently serious. Too little being merry and you seem like a kill-joy, too po-faced. The trick as ever is to steer the middle way in between two extremes.

Thursday last week was Corpus Christi or as we prefer to call it in the Anglican Communion, The Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion. At the heart of our Sunday service, our Eucharist, is the communion itself and briefly, this morning, I'd like to once again consider the mystery that is at the centre of our worship: the presence of Christ here in our service.

Since God is, by definition, omnipresent, his presence is necessarily everywhere and if he is everywhere, then he must be here too with us now ! The start of our act of communion is slightly different from what it was when I was younger. I love the current opening versicle and response:

The Lord is here

His spirit is with us

And that my friends sets the tone for what we are about to do. We are about symbolically to re-enact the Last Supper, in particular, Jesus blessing first the bread and then the wine.

Now, we will inevitably differ as to what we may understand by ‘this is my body’ and by ‘this is my blood’ but in the bread broken for us and in the wine poured out for us, we have two elements of life–sustaining nourishment – food and drink. Jesus says he is the bread of life and earlier in John’s gospel, he also says he is the source of truly thirst–quenching water. To eat his bread and to drink his wine is spiritually sustaining. Whether we believe that here in our service of Holy Communion, the bread and wine are a symbol or the real presence, fact is Jesus is here in our hearts and minds every time we remember him.

So let me conclude not with our text ‘**I am the bread of life**’ but with our quotation from Luke / Isaiah: ‘Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die.’ Die we all must – sooner or later. But if Christ is truly with us, really sustaining us with his body and his blood, then we have every reason to be merry – to be essentially joyful. We’d be stupid not to be, wouldn’t we ?

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew’s, Dinard

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G: Sermons 30 : Corpus Christi

