

In the name of the father, and of the son and of the Holy spirit Amen

In Synagogue, Jesus decreed,

*'My life is the life you should lead!*

*Food and drink in my Name*

*It's my Spirit – the same!*

*I'm in you, alive as you feed!'*

This is our Gospel reading in limerick form.

Christopher Goodwins – who incidentally appeared recently on Pointless – has written The Bible in Limerick verse, which gives a different insight into this morning's reading.

Food and drink in my name - what is this food and drink?

Is it the stuff that keeps us physically alive?

The stuff that keeps us mentally alert?

The bread and wine that we consume that keeps us spiritually alive?

Food and drink comes from many sources and not always good ways.

Today we hear of many people taking legal highs, or taking performance-enhancing drugs. Did you know that it has been suggested that incense could be a legal high? Those of you who read the Church Times may have seen an article at the end of July that discussed the possibility that using incense could be criminalised in the psychoactive substances bill. All sorts of things that we take into our bodies affect who we are, what we can do and how we are.

Many of us go on diets, we try to ensure a healthy diet, we try to lose weight, we stop eating or drinking things that make us feel unwell.

We may diet – but there is one food and one drink that we don't need to restrict.

Last week we heard about Jesus saying "I am the bread of life" and how that was seen as challenging and was not well received. That Jesus heard the grumbling and the discontent of those who heard this statement.

In today's gospel reading Jesus takes it even further. No longer just saying "I am the bread of life." But now adding to that "I am the living bread". Continuing with "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."

This is a controversial passage – at the time, for the early church and still for us today.

This passage is often understood as John's version of the last supper – as it sets out the importance of the Eucharist - the receiving of bread and wine.

It is just as controversial as when Jesus said it.

Jesus was pushing buttons – he was forcing a reaction. Have no doubt Jesus knew that he was being controversial. He knew the scriptures – he knew what Leviticus had to say about the consuming of blood. "For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off," (Lev. 17:14).

Jesus knew the consequences of that action, and yet here he is telling the gathered peoples that they needed to consume his blood to be saved.

Yeah right – that is one literal interpretation.

Consider, that Jesus was providing a demonstration of the need to recognise Jesus as the Son of God. Remember, he has just clearly identified himself with God, through his use of the first of the "I am" statements found in John's Gospel – "I am the Bread of Life". Now as he expands his teaching Jesus is drawing us into an understanding, not of being cannibals, rather of being followers and disciples who through God's grace are drawn closer to Jesus through the eating of bread and wine.

When we come to receive bread and wine at the altar, a gift that here in St James the Great is available to any who wish to come forward and hold out their hands to receive Jesus, how we receive that gift will be different for each of us.

For some it is a representation of Jesus' body and blood, for others it is in memory of the sacrifice Christ made as he died upon the cross and for others the bread and wine will be the real presence of Christ. However, each of us understands that what is happening today to the bread and wine may not be how we always understand what is happening.

Some years ago I was co-leading a confirmation class. The other leader asked those to be confirmed what they believed was happening to the bread and wine – they all described their understanding of the real presence. I was then asked to explain my understanding – that of representation. This was to show that group of explorers that it was ok to have a different understanding.

Now I would answer - that I do believe in the real presence. But that only came after a momentous experience one day at the Eucharist. It was Maximillian Kolb's day; I was at the midday Mass at the Franciscan Friary in Alnmouth on a silent retreat. As the Eucharistic prayer was being said I had an overwhelming sensation that as the bread and wine were being consecrated, it was Christ lying on the altar. I almost refused to receive. I say almost, because as soon as that thought came into my head it was dismissed by the sense that I could not refuse Christ's gift of himself to me in that bread and wine. Since then I have believed that the real presence of Christ is in the consecrated bread and wine.

I know that for most of you here that is different to what you believe is happening in the consecration of the bread and wine. And that is wonderful – as here we represent the breadth of the Church of England, where all can find a home.

What is important is not what we believe we are consuming; rather it is the difference consuming bread and wine makes to our relationship with Jesus.

Today when you come forward to the altar rail you will be invited to receive the body and blood of Christ.

As the bread is placed in your hands, or on your tongue, you will hear the words - The body of Christ.

As you receive the wine from the chalice you will hear the words – The blood of Christ.

These words will transmit different meanings to each of you.

But the question is; are we encountering Jesus as we receive bread and wine?

And how does this impact on our relationship with Jesus?

We eat and drink bread and wine, taking something of Christ into our mouths, into our stomachs, into our bodies. We are fed with Christ, whether as a memorial, as a representation or as the real presence. So Christ is in us and

we are in Christ. Through this communion, we can move closer to Christ and to the heart of God, so close that we can be as intimate with Jesus as the Father is with the Son. Thus transforming our relationship with Jesus.

Today's communion hymn sums this transformation up as it says 'Now let us from this table rise, renewed in body, mind and soul' 'With minds alert, upheld by grace to spread the Word in speech and deed.'

As we are transformed, growing closer to Christ, we are called to share this with those who are without that relationship.

Receiving bread and wine, the body and blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ is often considered to be an individual act; in reality it is a communal act. One that each of us who is a communicant member of the church, is called to share with those who do not receive the love of Jesus, through the sacrament of bread and wine.

Together we are Christ's body here on earth through our differing understanding of the Eucharist, our understanding of Scripture and the gifts we have to offer.

So as we began

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Amen