

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

November 13, 2016

## **“Life, Blood, and the Bible”**

*John 6:48-58*

*(Intro, Prayer)*

Honestly, I was going to try to make this message today about hunting, but I only found two verses on hunters in the Bible. #1 - Genesis 25:27, “Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents.” #2 - And Genesis 10:8-9, “Cush was the father of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.” They didn’t really lead me anywhere, but I would like to become a mighty hunter before the Lord, wouldn’t you?

Rifle season starts on Tuesday, and I will be taking some time away with my dad to try and get some venison for my family. Truth is, hunting is a messy endeavor. My son helped me gut a deer I hit with my car earlier this year. It really was gross, and of course, it involved a lot of blood. I’m not very good around blood. Even though my father is a veterinarian and an avid hunter, anything involving blood makes me queasy. Booster shots, blood drawing, donating blood, gutting deer...I am just not comfortable, even though I know many of these things have to be done.

Why are people afraid of blood? It’s a natural response. Think about it. Blood generally is supposed to stay inside our body. When it comes out, it’s usually because something is wrong. (Menstruation excepted, of course.)

But here’s the thing: in church, we talk about Jesus’ blood a lot. We praise it, sing songs about it, refer to it in our prayers. We pray for the grape juice in

communion to become Jesus' blood for us. We ask, "Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?" (*Play the song.*) They are singing about blood, and they are so happy?!

Imagine, if you can, that you were someone who had never been in a church before and had never read the Bible, and suddenly you were exposed to all this bloody talk. Wouldn't it be confusing? This is a church, not a sheep ranch. We are not killing anything or anyone, and no one is going to go home after church and use Oxiclean to get blood stains out of their clothes. At least, I hope not.

Really, the question we are asking ourselves today is, what does Jesus' blood have to do with us? We just read Jesus' words: "...unless you eat [my] flesh and drink [my] blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53) What is he really saying? Because I don't want to be a cannibal, and neither do you.

It turns out, we aren't the only ones who are confused. As we read this morning, the Jews argued sharply among themselves: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52) The issue of Jesus' flesh and blood has been around for a long time. Today I want to shed (pun intended) some light on this confusion.

First, a little background. This story in John 6 is part of a much longer discourse. It started with an amazing miracle – Jesus fed five thousand people. (John 6:1-15) Then Jesus performed another miracle by walking on water. (John 6:16-24) Clearly, the author of this gospel wants to show that Jesus is a prophet greater than Moses, who also performed miracles involving bread (manna) and water (the parting of the Red Sea.) (See Exodus 14 and 16.)

The Jews followed Jesus after the miraculous feeding, looking for more food, and looking for some answers. They asked Jesus to give them another

miraculous sign, so that they could believe in him. Jesus promised them the “bread of heaven,” which they eagerly requested. (John 6:32-34) The parallel here is that Moses gave their ancestors manna, which “rained down from heaven.” (Exodus 16:4) Jesus pointed out, though, that it wasn’t Moses, it was really God the Father who gave them this bread.

Then in verse 35, the story hits a critical point: Jesus tells them that he is the Bread of Life. This sets off the whole discussion about Jesus’ flesh and blood. You see, blood was very important in the Jewish practice of faith. Moses taught that shedding blood was necessary for forgiveness. Blood was so precious, so important, that the Jews were forbidden to eat it. Leviticus 17:11 says, “The life of a creature is in the blood, and I [God] have given it too you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar.” The Jews understood, when anyone sinned, blood had to be spilt. One life was sacrificed to spare another. God’s view of sin is deadly seriously.

With that understanding, think about how radical Jesus’ declaration is: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51) When the Jews heard this, they couldn’t understand. Did Jesus want them to be cannibals? That’s what it sounded like. But Jesus was actually looking forward to the cross. Remember, the gospel of John was the last gospel to be written. It is one of the youngest books of the Bible. The theology of the cross and the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, as we call it, were already well developed in the church. So John had the benefit of writing this story looking back. When Jesus said he would give his life for the world, by the time this was written, he already had died and rose again.

Jesus was not talking literally, he was speaking allegorically. Metaphorically. He was saying that his blood - his life, his presence - was the only thing that could sustain anyone's spirit for eternity. "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53) Jesus isn't talking about vampires and zombies. Nobody is eating brains here. Jesus is talking about dependency on him and him alone. And of course, the Jews would have rejected this. First, on the basis of the misunderstanding of what Jesus' blood was, and second, because they refused to worship Jesus as Savior or admit that he was from God.

The Bible says that blood equals life. That's pretty amazing for such an old book. Did you know that even in George Washington's lifetime, doctors would "bleed" people to let the "bad blood" out? Seems silly to us today, because we know how important our blood is.

I have a friend who is a Messianic Jew. I think he gets this whole "blood thing" better than I do. He believes in Jesus as the Son of God, but as a family, they still celebrate all the Jewish holidays, along with the Christian ones. I think my friend understands better than I do what being Jewish really means, and the important of blood, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

Remember, Jesus was a Jew. Jesus would never violate the Jewish law. If eating blood was forbidden, I am sure Jesus never ate it. By asking the people to drink his blood, he was deliberately giving them a difficult metaphor that would require a life change. He was asking them to break from tradition: break from trying to save and sustain yourselves; instead, trust in Jesus completely.

Eating and drinking sustains our lives, our bodies. And the truth is, we crave life. We cling to it. But selfishly trying to hold on to your life brings you the

opposite of eternal life. We foolishly spend our money on programs and security and medical fads intending to squeeze every last possible second out our meager 70 or 80 years. That's not what Jesus wants us to do. He wants us to share our lives and lay them down for others, the way he did. In John 15:13, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Unfortunately, the deer don't really understand this. But we should.

If we are desperate for eternal life, we need to see Jesus as our real spiritual food and drink. Maybe it is a mistake for us to not focus much on Jesus' blood, literally. Because regardless of our aversion to blood, the fact remains that his blood was shed for you. For me. For all. The power of the cross lies in the fact that Jesus suffered in his body. He willingly offered his flesh, blood, and bones, everything that he was, for our forgiveness. When we refuse to acknowledge the physical facts of Jesus' death, it weakens the whole salvation story.

The truth is, Jesus really lived, and he really died. He really was the son of the God, the Messiah. The Jews refused to accept that. They would have no part of his flesh and blood. What about us?

Can I ask you, are you as desperate for Jesus as you are for food and drink? Do you identify that Jesus's flesh and blood sustain your spirit? Where are you going for spiritual nourishment? Your friends? Your family? A boyfriend or girlfriend? Your wealth? The internet? Politics?

The real question about Jesus' blood is this: what are you trusting to save you?

Jesus' blood is not something to avoid or reject. It's something to embrace. His flesh is real food – Jesus wants to be that close to you. Not in a literal,

physical way. Better than that. He wants to sustain every part of your spirit with his mercy, his grace, and his joy. That's the power of his blood.

Jesus died a very real, human death to set us free. Our response to Christ's shed blood is summed up well in these verses. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:14-15 - "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

As a church, we need to see red. Not anger, of course. We need to see that Jesus' blood is covering all of us. His blood will never fail us. We don't need to keep this a secret. It's not a mystery. It's something to be shared. His blood, his body, is our price for eternal life.

Please take a moment of reflection as we listen to this song.

*Martin Smith "Jesus' Blood Never Fails Me."*

### Memory Verse

**John 6:35** - Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

### Reflection questions

1. When have you experienced extreme hunger and thirst? How did you satisfy your need for food and drink?
2. Have you ever been confused about Jesus' blood? Why? How did the church help or hinder your understanding?
3. Do you rely on Jesus for your life? How?
4. How do you feel knowing that Jesus was willing to die to save you?