

A couple of months ago I preached on “transformation,” specifically “transformation” through “great love and great suffering.” Transformation, great love, and great suffering are big themes of Scripture, impossible to cover in a single sermon – but not to worry; I’m not going to try again this morning.

This morning we’ll get all the transformation we need when we celebrate the Eucharist (holy communion) in just a few minutes – just like we do every Sunday. My favorite teacher likes to call the Eucharistic Celebration a “Transformation Machine.”

In today’s Gospel, we’re in chapter 6 of John, Jesus will say He is the true bread that came down from heaven 12 times; 4 times He will say we have to eat his flesh and drink his blood. We began hearing about it in last Sunday’s Gospel, and you’ll continue to hear about in all of the remaining Gospels in August. Do you think Jesus and the lectionary are trying to get our attention? I think so; and I think it’s because Jesus wants us to understand how He is going to transform us.

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Jesus says these words in today’s Gospel well before He celebrates the Lord’s Supper in John’s Passion Narrative in chapter 13.

But, the “extended promise” of John 6 is precisely the Eucharistic Celebration that we will reenact this morning: “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me; This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

When Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” we naturally get the “bread” part. From the Exodus – God the Father feeding the Israelites “manna”, “bread from heaven” – to the prayer Jesus taught us, “Give us today our daily bread,” we...get...“bread.” As Gandhi says: “There are so many hungry people in the world that God could only come into the world in the form of food.”

But Jesus didn’t just come as the “bread from heaven.” Jesus came as the bread of – life.

Here are the final two verses in today's Gospel: "This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

We know what it means to be hungry, to eat food, and be satisfied. But what does it mean that "true bread" provides us life, in the sense Jesus is speaking of?

Here's how the great preacher John MacArthur puts it: "The bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives what? Life to the world. Life: *zoe*~ (*in the Greek*). Not *bios*, not biological life. *Zoe*~, spiritual life. That's why (Jesus) came." Bread becomes life – and this life, life in Jesus, is life that is eternal – beginning now.

And there's the transformation, the change that occurs when we receive Jesus.

This bread and wine will become the Body and Blood of Christ that we will receive at communion today, the Real Presence; Jesus transforms our life, changes us by feeding us – beginning now.

Here's Pastor MacArthur again: "Believing is eating. Taking in, receiving, and appropriating (think commendeering). 'He who eats this bread will live forever.'...This is a powerful metaphor that everybody understands. You have to receive (Jesus). That is our responsibility."

So what do you bring to the meal; what is your responsibility? Well, you will bring up the gifts of bread and wine. You've already worshiped the Living God, listened to the Word of God; and you will confess your sins, continue to pray and sing God's praises. That's all wonderful; and of course God loves us for it.

But don't forget your "hunger."

What is hunger? MacArthur says, "It's the aching of the heart of one who knows (they are) empty. That's the work of the Holy Spirit to make your heart hungry...Eating (becomes) necessary."

Your responsibility is to come to Communion hungry. And don't worry. If you're not terribly hungry right now, the Holy Spirit will help you.

After Jesus' last supper, his disciples weren't hungry enough to really receive Jesus – yet. They would have to see Jesus after the resurrection, and receive the Holy Spirit, before they were truly transformed, changed. We have already received the Holy Spirit, and in just a few minutes we will eat “the bread of life” receiving Jesus, the “food that endures for eternal life.

I'll let you decide if all this qualifies the Eucharistic Celebration as a Transformation Machine.

“I am the true bread of life,” Jesus tells us; and that transforms not only the bread, but our lives now and for all eternity. Thank you Lord.