

Though we are many we are one body, because we all share in one bread. Today we have a chance to wonder and to explore why we gather as a community to break and share bread on this feast of Corpus Christi the Body of Christ. We come here, week in, week out and celebrate this ritual, which to much of society now seems bizarre. We stand and sit, we sing and say things and various objects like crosses, bread, wine books and even people are processed around with a great deal of reverence, but why? Though we are many we are one body, because we all share in one bread.

The gospel passage we have this morning to wonder and explore with, is from the Gospel of John. Strangely although we place a lot of wisdom in John's gospel on many parts of the life of the church, there is no explicit last supper passage in John. No words that are familiar to us in our eucharistic service at all.

While the passion narrative takes place and Jesus finds his way to the cross, John's Gospel only briefly mentions in chapter 13 that a meal takes place, but only in order to refer to a sense of time. The focus of the last supper in John's is not about bread and wine which doesn't even get a look in, but about Jesus washing his disciples' feet and all we get about the meal is that it was happening but nothing else. To quote directly, John says "the evening meal was in progress" and that as Jesus goes to wash his disciples feet he "got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waste." With regards to the Gospel of John, that is all we hear of the great meal which we enact as a symbol of our redemption. In the other Gospel's Matthew, Mark and Luke -the synoptic gospels - we hear in some form or another, the familiar words of "Take, eat this is my Body" and "This is my blood of the new covenant" but in John, nothing just the fact that a meal took place just before the Passover Festival.

We can however gain some wisdom from John about the Eucharist, about our sharing of bread and wine, but not where we might first look. This

morning's snippet of John's gospel shows us Jesus talking to his disciples about the bread of life but as always what is most significant about our text this morning is where it is set in the grand narrative of John's Gospel. Chapter 6 of John's Gospel contains three very key moments of our Christian understanding, the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walking on water, and then this morning's text, Jesus calling himself the bread of life. And so chapter 6 of John's Gospel unfolds like this:

A great crowd of people were following Jesus in anticipation for what this great mystical man might do next and just like our last supper narratives in Matthew, Mark and Luke the Passover festival was near. There was great anxiety as, how were these thousands of people going to be fed? And so, after finding five barley loaves and two fish Jesus took them 'gave thanks' and distributed both to all who were there, until they were satisfied. And so here we begin to see our Eucharistic understanding coming from the middle of John's Gospel, not from the last supper but from the feeding of the five thousand. It is worth noting that it is believed that early eucharistic meals or agape meals focused much more around bread and fish and food, rather than wafers and wine.... But after this great feeding in John's Gospel, the disciples mysteriously leave by boat without Jesus which I can never quite understand, but then Jesus of course follows on foot walking on water as he and his disciples leave the scene of the feeding as night draws in. In the morning however the great crowd continue to follow Jesus and Jesus is put in front of the crowd again. And so Jesus says to the crowd "you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you were filled by loaves." And so Jesus warns "do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life." And so then Jesus explains that "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry" and so it is here that we begin to understand what it means to say the body of Christ. Jesus is the bread of life, but of course we do something rather odd with Jesus the bread

of life, as we eat. It is a concept that is odd and if you begin to think about it too much you can think what on earth are we doing.

But when we eat the bread of life, we are not just consuming it, but we are being consumed. John's gospel frames our understanding of the eucharist, of sharing bread and wine, not only in Jesus' death on the cross, but in his life. This gives a very different emphasis: we are not only talking about the body of Christ which hung on the cross, but the living bread which Jesus gave to his disciples while he was alive. Jesus says "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever" It is not exclusively in Jesus' death and passion that he says 'take eat' but in his life. As we join in the life of the living Christ, we consume this living bread in order to be consumed by it ourselves to be made into one body. We consume so that we too may be consumed into that living body as we gather as a community here today, but also with saints and angels throughout the ages. Though we are many we are one body, because we all share in one bread. Though we are all gathered as individuals, when we receive the body of Christ, we are in turn being received ourselves into that same body, the body of Christ, the living bread that endures beyond any physical bread ever could. But of course, the body of Christ also so much bigger than us, so much bigger than the church. When we talk of the body of Christ we are talking of that living bread which knows no bounds. When we break bread together, we break it in the hope of the complete life that we will all one day receive. We break the living bread in the knowledge that as we do so, we become closer together as a community, as we consume and are consumed in turn, into the living body of Christ that not even the church can limit.

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