

Some Disgusting Words of Jesus

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, on August 24, 1997: Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43; Psalm 84; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I usually listen to National Public Radio when I'm in the car. I especially like to listen to *Morning Edition* or one of the news and talk shows in the afternoon. But I've been discovering recently when I get in the car that the radio is turned to 94.1 on the F.M. dial where, in the morning, Howard Stern is the talk show host. He is disgusting. In the afternoon I'll push the scan button and the radio stops on Rush Limbaugh. I listen for a few minutes to Rush and get so disgusted that I turn back to NPR. One time I was channel surfing on the t.v. and discovered the Jerry Springer show: he discusses some of the most disgusting topics you could imagine on his show. What is it about Americans who seem to have a growing appetite for disgusting entertainment? Or maybe we've always been that way. My mother found Elvis Presley and Bob Dylan disgusting.

Look up the word *disgust* in the dictionary. It means *to make someone feel sick or offended*. The word *disgust* comes from two Latin words meaning "to lose one's appetite". The word *disgust* originally was primarily related to food. Some foods are considered disgusting. Each ethnic group has some foods that other ethnic groups find disgusting. While reading the biography of Gertrude Bell, *The Desert Queen*, who had so much to do with the birth of the modern state of Iraq, I discovered that Bedouin nomads offer their honored guests the eye-ball of a lamb. I find that disgusting. Bedouins find them to be a delicacy. Last year I heard the testimony of a Christian from Kenya, from the Masai tribe. He had been abandoned on a trash heap as a baby and found and adopted by Presbyterian missionaries. He explained how Masai tribesmen enjoy drinking the blood of cows mixed with milk. The very thought disgusts me. For most of us the thought of drinking blood fills us with disgust.

And that leads us directly to some disgusting words Jesus spoke to his disciples. *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them... whoever eats me will live because of me.* Now remember, the Old Testament explicitly forbids the drinking of blood, let

alone human blood. Nothing that Howard Stern or Rush Limbaugh or Jerry Springer said could have been more disgusting than what Jesus said to his Jewish disciples.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, *This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?* ^{They wanted to turn him off like...} But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, *Does this disgust you?* As a result of these disgusting words we read that *many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.* So Jesus asked the twelve apostles, *Do you also wish to go away?* Simon Peter answered him, *Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*

Not everything that Jesus says is easy to digest. ^{we listened carefully because we believe --} Jesus often spoke metaphorically to sift those who really trusted him from those who were simply along for the ride. For example, Jesus said to Nicodemus, *You must be born again.* Nicodemus took Jesus literally and wondered how he could reenter his mother's womb and be reborn. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks on the metaphorical level. Literalists rejected what Jesus had to say. On a literal level ~~what he said was disgusting. But Jesus spoke on a deeper level.~~ He often spoke metaphorically to teach his disciples that he is absolutely necessary for life - he is the source of all life. He is more necessary for life than meat and drink.

The Christian church confesses that apart from Christ's death on the cross, which ^{Some people find that disgusting. slaughter House religion} entailed his shed blood, our world is lost; we are lost. In some mysterious way, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself through Christ's broken body and shed blood on the cross. There is life in his blood.

Some of you may remember the story told by Col. John W. Mansur several years ago in Reader's Digest. During the height of the war in Vietnam mortar shells began to land in an orphanage run by Christian missionaries in a small Vietnamese village. The missionaries and one or two children were killed outright, and several more children were wounded, including one young girl, about eight years old.

People from the village requested medical help from a neighboring town that had radio contact with American forces. Finally, an American Navy doctor and nurse arrived in a jeep

with only their medical kits. They discovered the little girl was the most critically injured.

Without a transfusion of blood she'd be lost. A quick blood test indicated that neither American had the correct blood type, but several of the uninjured orphans did.

The doctor spoke just a little Vietnamese and the nurse, a smattering of French. Using that combination they tried to explain to the young, frightened orphans that unless they could replace some of the girl's lost blood, she would certainly die. Then they asked if anyone would be willing to give blood to help.

Their request was met with wide-eyed silence. After several long moments, a small hand slowly and waveringly went up, dropped back down, and then went up again.

Oh, thank you, the nurse said in French. *What is your name?*

Heng, came the reply.

Heng was quickly laid on a pallet, his arm swabbed with alcohol, and a needle inserted in his vein. Through this ordeal Heng lay stiff and silent.

~~After a moment, he let out a shuddering sob, quickly covering his face with his free hand.~~

Is it hurting, Heng? the doctor asked. Heng shook his head, but after a few moments another sob escaped, and once more he tried to cover up his crying. Again the doctor asked him if the needle hurt, and again Heng shook his head.

But now his occasional sobs gave way to a steady, silent crying, his eyes screwed tightly shut, his fist in his mouth to stifle his sobs.

The medical team was concerned. Something was obviously very wrong. At this point, a Vietnamese nurse arrived to help. Seeing the little one's distress, she spoke to him rapidly in Vietnamese, listened to his reply and answered him in a soothing voice.

After a moment, the patient stopped crying and looked questioningly at the Vietnamese nurse. When she nodded, a look of great relief spread over his face.

Glancing up, the nurse said quietly to the Americans, *He thought he was dying. He misunderstood you. He thought you had asked him to give all his blood so the little girl could live.*

But why would he be willing to do that asked the Navy nurse.

The Vietnamese nurse repeated the question to the little boy, who answered simply, *She's my friend.*

Jesus is our friend. He is God in the flesh.[^] *He gave all his blood.* His blood was poured out to save us, to give us eternal life. He is the way and the truth and the life. Apart from him no one comes to the Father in heaven. To eat his flesh and drink his blood is to respond in faith and gratitude to his great sacrifice of his body and blood on the cross.

Next Sunday I will sit behind the Lord's Table and take bread and wine and repeat the words of Jesus, *I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst. Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out.* Jesus not only gives us our daily bread, he gives us himself for food. Jesus does not so much give us good things. He gives us himself.

When we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion, Jesus is really here. He is the host. He invites us to the table. He's also the meal. He gives us, not just bread and wine, but his very self. He gives himself 100% to strengthen us for our daily work. And yet, at every celebration of Holy Communion less than half of the members of our church, all of whom have professed faith in Christ, actually come to be fed by him. A lot of people are not being nurtured. A lot of people have found substitute food that will not be able to nourish them into eternal life. A lot of people who have confessed their faith in Christ, who once had a close relationship with God through Christ, have not come to the Table for years. But God in Christ is here waiting for you and for them to come.

Did you see the article the woman wrote about her relationship with her father? When I was young, she said, my father and I were as close as we could be. And the time that I knew it best would be on those family party occasions when after the big meal somebody would pull out the old family record player and put on polka records. And when, eventually, the Beer Barrel Polka would be played, that was my special song, and my father would come over to me, and

reach out his hand and say, *Come on girl, let's roll those blues away* and we'd dance, my father and I, we'd dance.

One day, however, at one of those parties, when I was ^{a teenager} ~~an adolescent~~ and for reasons known only to ^{teenagers} ~~adolescents~~ in one of those blue, funky moods they put on the Beer Barrel Polka, my father came over to me with hands outstretched and I slapped his hand away. *You leave me alone, don't touch me.* Startled, he turned, and he never invaded my privacy again. He danced with my mother and my sisters but not with me.

I'd come home from a date. He'd be waiting on me in the old chair, his bathrobe tied around him, a book in his lap, half asleep. I'd say, *What are you doin'?* *Why don't you go on to bed?* He'd look up at me with sad eyes and say, *I was just waiting on you.*

I was glad to leave the house when I grew up. We had a formal relationship but then I began to miss him. But I didn't know how to bridge the gap. Until one day I was home for one ^{home-made bread, my father's home-made wine ... as well as turkey ...} of those big family meals and somebody put on the Beer Barrel Polka and as my father walked across the room I went up to him and said, *I believe this is my dance.* He turned and said, *I've been waiting on you. I've been waiting on you.*

^{The God we know in Jesus Christ is waiting on us.}
Go home today and tell your friends that, next Sunday, the Lord Jesus Christ will be waiting for them and for us. There will be a supper of bread and wine provided for them. The Lord Jesus Christ himself will be here. He will be the host. He will be the food. He promises to feed us. He does not feed us *only* with the good things he has made. He feeds us his very self. He's waiting for me. He's waiting for you. He's waiting for us. He's waiting for a hungry world.

Let us pray: Almighty God, you provide the true bread from heaven, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant that we who receive the Sacrament of his body and blood may abide in him and he in us, that we may be filled with the power of his endless life, now and forever. Amen.