

**Andrew Dunn**

## **EATING AND DRINKING OF THE LORD**

### **John 6: 51-58.**

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

This is a startling statement of Jesus as he tries to expand for all his listeners in the Capernaum synagogue, followers and enemies, deeper things about himself.

Why bread and wine? Because he needed to illustrate in images, examples of the central truths of the gospel. He wasn't just talking about levels of friendship or intimacy that happened between them. He needed a way to captivate and get them all thinking much more seriously about who he is!

Yes, it is about intimacy. It is about levels of experience and depth of contact and ways of knowing!

It's about imbibing, drinking at levels that are away deeper, away beyond a sip from any old cup! Or a nibble from the holy bread of the sacred events of the synagogue, or from a boys lunch. And as we partake here today we are invited to take the stark and simple images of bread and wine and let them stretch our imaginations and deepen our insights into the realities of what we do here today.

I suggest that at its heart we are being invited to let our understandings go deeper than we have known.

I have a photo I took at Pupu Springs near Nelson some years ago - it's of the central powerful energy that makes the water swirl and and pulsate and rise up like a mound of water that is alive with energy. It is only water but the swirling and mounding of it captivates and thrills as we watch. So what's the energy that drives the bread and wine to energise us and make us embrace the truth that there is more to this eating bread and drinking wine than at a picnic! As Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat and drink of the Son of Man you have no life in you!" In my work as a spiritual guide for people I find myself asking somewhere along the way, "So what signs of grace have you seen in this experience?" So in this sharing together of the bread and wine, of Jesus' life and energy that's a good question to ponder: What touches of grace and God's loving am I enjoying here is this sacrament?

And it won't be the same for each one of us. There is room for special discoveries and unique experiences. One personal story I like to remember is about my mother Edith. She was a wonderful singer and had many favourite songs and hymns. When she was dying with cancer in her 40s she left this life with that beautiful Fanny Crosby gospel song on her lips: "Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on his gentle breast." She had discovered a

deepening image of relationship and it grew and grew in her as life ebbed away. She was safe in his arms, on his breast as she died.

Do you have a deepening image that's growing in you, for you, with you? Don't be afraid of it. Cherish it, love it, enjoy it day by day.

Another matter: Why "body" and why "blood"? I suggest that Jesus, and John, see the body, his flesh as John puts it, has to do with the really meaty food that we need to nourish and strengthen us. So too with blood - blood equals life that is flowing for us. In fact right now here in NZ our blood banks across the country are short of life giving blood and plasma. We need it for healing and strengthening us too spiritually - we need more of the life giving qualities that Jesus gives to us. We found in our retreat work that very often what people found on retreats in the beauty, the quiet and the richness of those days there was great renewal for each one and for the situations we all came from and go back to. So too in Communion. In eating the bread we are strengthened by the richness of his personality, his body. And in drinking of the wine we are blessed by the renewing and life giving realities of Jesus as the flow of life in our veins.

Another thought: we need to be careful not to over simplify it too much. Keep the air of mystery and learn to live with the mystery of the bread and the wine. Let the mystery fascinate us and expand us more deeply time after time!! In fact, get thrilled with the mystery of Jesus' presence in this sacrament as you, as we take him deeply into our bodies, our lives, our reality.

AMEN.