

If you are planning to join in the Parish Picnic & Play at Lonesome Mountain after this service, then..as it turns out..you already have a lot in common with the Bible today. Because you have already had to ask yourself two important questions: (1) What am I going to *wear*? and (2) What am I going to *eat*?

Maybe, deciding what to take for your *picnic to eat* might have been easier than deciding what to *wear*? Because if you are planning to drive from here to the picnic then you may have decided to be more casual in your dress than you are used to at church—which is something we have invited you to do if you wished. At the very least, you may have had to reconsider what *shoes* to wear in both places. Deciding on your *food* may not have been that different from packing a lunch, unless you were inspired to get more creative.

All of us have to make practical decisions about *clothing* and *food* every day--unless someone picks out your clothing, or makes all your food. And our choices depend on whether we are going to work, or school, travelling or staying home. And for some folks, one may be more important than another—*food* more of a priority over *clothing*...or *clothing* more important than what *food* to eat. But still, to some extent, we all have to decide every day: (1) What am I going to *wear*? and (2) What am I going to *eat*? |

When we consider what we have heard from the scripture today, it is possible to say that *the apostle Paul is talking about what to wear*...and *Jesus is talking about what to eat*. But of course in each case, they are talking about a *different kind of clothing*...and a *different kind of food*...as if there can be such a thing. |

*First, let's consider the different kind of clothing...as we hear in Ephesians:* Everyone living in the New Testament world would have been very familiar with seeing *body armor*. Living in the Roman Empire, Roman soldiers were ubiquitous...you could potentially see a Roman soldier anywhere in the course of your day. And they were all dressed similarly—and nearly always dressed for warfare. They usually wore a protective plate on their chest, a heavy belt, a helmet, boots, and carried a sword and shield.

The apostle Paul refers to their common experience of this sight...to talk about a different kind of *clothing*—a different kind of *body armor* which Christians are called to wear—called “the whole armor of God”. | Honestly, it is easy to not take this very seriously...until perhaps...we suffer experiences in our life which exceed our ability to understand...and to effectively cope with.

The more I have witnessed in my life...and the more I have suffered the shared struggles of our own time...the more I have been open to thinking that, indeed...as Paul says, we “struggle...not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”. Yes, there are a multitude of demographic, economic, sociological, psychological, and political forces at play, and sometimes we can understand parts of it. But things have often left me wondering over the years: “What in the world is the world coming to?” |

When you ask questions like that then the *spiritual body armor* of which Paul speaks can begin to sound more and more *practical*...that we not only need to think about what clothing we are going to wear every day...but also what spiritual clothing too...*what spiritual awareness we need to be cloaked in*...in order to better navigate all the stuff in our lives these days. So, Paul talks about “wearing”:

- truth...instead of false thinking
- righteousness...instead of harming
- the gospel of peace...instead of wrath
- faith...instead of cynicism
- salvation...instead of self-help
- the Spirit...and the Word of God...instead of only listening to ourselves talk.

Such spiritual clothing is intriguing—but still, there are a lot of ideas there to understand and to try to embrace. In the meantime, still, what we need is practical help, sooner rather than later, for another day, and another week.

And so what I would suggest to you is that *every Sunday at Church...we are being helped by God to get “dressed”*. In this physical gathering, there is a *spiritual* gathering. In these written prayers and readings, there are *spiritual* words. We don't understand it all, but we are being clothed here by more than just our own thoughts and efforts. If we just don't get in too much of a hurry here...and are willing to abide in these moments...then it is more likely that God sink in. |

So, just as we have to think about what clothing to wear every day...we also will need to think about the *spiritual* clothing we need.

And just as we have to think about what food to eat every day...we will also need to think about the *spiritual* food we need. And this brings us to the reading from the Gospel of John. |

Today's Gospel reading actually repeats some of what we heard last Sunday. And if you were here then and recall—Jesus said some things that were hard to receive. And again today, we hear more of the same—a steady, repeated, disturbing refrain from Jesus where he keeps insisting over and over again: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” | It is almost a relief that the text itself confirms just how difficult this is, by saying: “When many of Jesus' disciples heard Jesus speak so, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?!” Not only does it not sound remotely spiritual, but it sounds grotesque. Obviously, Jesus is talking about Holy Communion and the sharing of bread and wine—but why does he talk about it like this?!

So let me share with you something I've recently learned that has helped me with Jesus' strange teaching. As it turns out, in the ancient stories of the old pagan gods, there is a recurring theme that the gods are *...hungry...for this world*. They are hungry...and they insist on being fed by human beings...whether it is blood sacrifices...or gifts of food...or anything else set aside just for them...or destroyed just for them. And to *fail* to feed the gods was to invite their *wrath*. So, it used to be in those ancient days—and still even today too—that when things went badly wrong in your life, the question was: *Oh no, so which god have I failed to feed?* And then you would try to figure that out and appease them by making amends. The old gods insisted on being fed...and they *were* continuously fed...with wars of aggression...with political domination...with chaos...and cruelty...and lies. And common folk were just fodder to be used and cast aside. The old gods in all their majesty...were heartless. Without our even realizing it today, there's still a lot of feeding of the old gods going on all the time—with all the pain and suffering that ceaselessly follows. |

What is actually so shocking about Jesus talking about *eating his flesh and drinking his blood* is that it is a complete *reversal* of all those old expectations. Jesus was not insisting to be fed like the old gods—with the sacrifices of cruelty and wrath. Instead, the true God *shall feed us* through Jesus—with God's own sacrifice of love...for us.

The LORD God shall be our food: “The Gifts of God for the People of God”.

The LORD God shall be our clothing: “Put on the whole armor of God”. |

Just like every other Sunday, today, God is feeding *us*...God is clothing *us*. And the more we can recognize it...the more we can receive some understanding of it. And be ready.