

I have spoken before about difficulties the lectionary places on us with passages out of context. Can I understand the point of a passage without understanding what has gone before and what is yet to come? In some cases it is not a problem; for example, when the passage we are asked to read is a complete parable. Then context is not so critical. This evening's passage from John is not such a passage; context is critical. Our passage is about 10% of the 6th chapter of John and occurs about 75% of the way through the chapter. Chapter 6 begins with the feeding of the 5000. Seeing the multitude approaching Jesus says to Philip, *Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?*. But then the next sentence reveals, *He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.* Jesus proceeds to feed the 5000 from 5 loaves and 2 fish, with 12 baskets of left-overs. The numbers are of course very significant "5" is indicative of the 5 books of the Torah or the Pentateuch which is the law. "2" refers to the 2 natures of Jesus, divine and human. "12", of course, refers to the disciples who remain 12 even after Judas' betrayal because after the Ascension the 11 elected Mathias to replace Judas and make up the number. The feeding of the multitude on so little speaks to the abundance from God and introduces bread as a metaphor for who Jesus is. The association with Jesus and bread continues. Those who ate of the bread and the fish say to Jesus beginning in verse 32: *Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'* Then Jesus said to them, *"Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* Then in verse 35, Jesus says *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.* Note the strong association being built here between bread and belief. And please remember that the original Greek word which is translated into English as belief is *pisteuō* which means so much more than belief. *Pisteuō* means trust and reliance; it is beyond cognition, more than intellectual agreement; it is deep, moral, and consumingly personal. Above all it is not passive; it demands conviction and an active response. Just before our passage begins in verse 51 Jesus says: *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.*

Bread in many cultures has meant so much more than a baked good made from grain and water. It becomes a symbol of the essentials of life. Most of us are old enough to remember when hip speech used bread to mean money, certainly an essential of life in our times.

Now we come to our passage. Again a piece of context is necessary. I drew your attention a few weeks ago to the fact that in John's Gospel there is no nativity story. The divine nature of Jesus is established when John the Baptist sees the Holy Spirit descend and remain in Jesus. Similarly although the institution of the Eucharist takes place at the last supper in each of the synoptic Gospels, there is no mention of the words of the institution of the Eucharist in the Johannine account of the last supper. In John's version there is no mention of bread or wine, instead the focus

is on Jesus washing the disciples' feet. So like the Spirit descending and remaining, in a very real sense, our passage from John this evening is the Johannine institution of the Eucharist. *So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them".*

Before our passage as I quoted above in verse 51 when Jesus speaks of eating the bread come down from heaven the word in Greek for eat is *esthio*, but in the passage just quoted the word for eat in Greek is *trogo* which is much more than the rather neutral word eat. It implies urgency or desperation, ravenous eating like that of an animal – eating as though on-going life depends on it. So just as *pisteuō* is so much more than believe, so *trogo* is so much more than eat.

So to "trogo" the bread is clearly a metaphor for "*pisteuō*" in Jesus – an all consuming, dynamic, active way of being that expresses the love of Jesus for all humanity. This is what this passage and, indeed, all the books of the Christian scripture lead us to.

There is another word in our passage that I think merits exploration. Verse 56: *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them*. The word is "abide". I think it would be very safe bet that the only time you have ever uttered the word "abide" is when you were singing the rather lugubrious hymn at a funeral. *Abide with me fast falls the eventide, the darkness deepens O with me abide*. Again we have a loss of meaning in translation. Abide in English means stay or remain. The Greek word that is translated as abide is *meno* which like *pisteuō* and *trogo* means a good deal more than the English word. *Meno* means a deep, persistent, enduring state of being. Just as when John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend and more importantly remain in Jesus, *abide in me and I in them* speaks to a deep, constant, and here's the key, mutual indwelling – *in me and I in them*. Verse 57: *Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me*. If we eat the bread of life with all the meaning of *trogo* and believe with all the meaning of *pisteuō* we will live in Jesus and he in us. *Abide/meno with me, indeed! Amen*