

“Eat. And Become. “

- Many years ago now, my older son Gaius was just moving from a diet of milk to one of solids
 - And this is a fun transition
 - My wife had this super high ambition of making our own baby food, but that did not work out
 - And we were buy baby food by the jars and pouches just like everyone else
 - Gaius was a good eater, and still is- he will try anything just once, and it's so much fun
 - And when he was a baby, he loved carrots, and sweet potatoes - lord we bought a lot of orange baby food jars
 - And some of it made it into his mouth, I guess, although considering the cleanup process one might have doubts
 - Enough of it made it down the hatch that one day, sitting at the table, I turned to look at him, and I noticed that he had an orange nose
 - Yes, his nose had turned orange. From all of the orange food.¹
 - In addition to a little concern, which new parents are famous for, I found it absolutely hilarious
 - We looked it up, and thankfully it is completely benign and happens a lot to babies who eat a lot of foods loaded in
 - Now you and I as adults probably will not turn orange if we eat to many carrots- I don't know, maybe we would
 - But our gut health directly affects all parts of us, doesn't it?
 - If you have an allergy, or are intolerant of gluten, or if you have ever eaten too many sweets and had a sugar hangover
 - You know it
 - And as we have been discussing for several weeks now, there is a lot of overlap between our physical bodies' needs and health
 - And our spiritual health
 - Spiritual food, which its again all over our scripture readings assigned for today, changes us just as much
 - When we eat, we become.

¹ <https://themommydaily.com/the-baby-orange-nose-scare-and-why-you-should-not-worry/>

- There is definitely a theme over the past few weeks, and it is of course one of provision
 - Both physical sustenance, and spiritual
 - And for this week, I see an added piece of not only sustenance, not only renewal, but one of transformation
 - Of eating, and becoming
 - In the first reading, we find Elijah having a very low moment in his life
 - In fact, he has given up
 - After winning a huge victory over the prophets of Baal- you remember that one?
 - Elijah challenges the prophets to a sacrifice-off, it's like a dance-off but with bull caucuses and wooden altars
 - The false prophets dance, they pray, they cry out, they even start cutting themselves to get Baal's attention, but nothing
 - And Elijah prays and God sends down fire so consuming it burns the altar, the bull sacrifice, and even the 12 barrels of water that were poured on the top
 - Then the false prophets are put to death, and Elijah begins running for his life
 - Because he has angered the queen and king, Jezebel and Ahab
 - Now he has run as far as he can go to escape their wrath, and has reached the wilderness with no where to go
 - No food, and no hope
 - I appreciate the insight we get here. This is Elijah. THE Elijah.
 - And he is so frustrated and disappointed that he has decided he should just die and get it over with
 - If Elijah can get that frustrated, then we can learn to be a little easier on ourselves too, can't we
 - And whether it is in a dream, or in the waking world, angels tend to Elijah and feed him
 - They bring him back to life spiritually and physically with food the angels eat
 - Elijah is transformed from hopeless, to invigorated.
 - He is strengthened to continue, and ultimately finds himself closer and closer to God again
 - He goes to Mount Horab, also known as Mt Sinai, or where Moses received the 10 Commandments²

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Horeb

- Before it is all over, God will have brought Elijah from the depths of despair under that broom tree
- To hearing the still quiet voice that is God's very presence
- Elijah goes on then changed, and ultimately returns to Ahab and Jezebel, and convinces Ahab to repent
- Finally, Elijah is taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire, leaving Elisha to be God's voice on Earth
- I tell you all of this Bible content because, well simply, I want you to know these stories of our faith
- You have to know them before you can find God in them
- And yes it is true that we can say that God provides to us in our darkest hours, thanks be to God
- And I think for this morning we can also see just how much we *become* when we receive the gifts God is offering us
- An abundant life, a transformed life, one full of purpose and meaning so much bigger than we are
- Jesus talks more about such a transformation today, of what happens when we partake of the Bread of Life
- As we move to our Gospel today, we are still in John and still within the Bread of Life discourse, as we discussed last week
 - In fact, the opening verse today, verse 35, is last week's final verse- it is rare our lectionary repeats them back to back
 - Jesus tells the crowd, "I am the bread of life". Eat it, and you'll never be hungry or thirsty again
 - And last week, the crowd's and our own prayer was, "Give us this bread always."
 - We all want to accept this invitation to new life, more abundant life
 - life that feeds our souls and satisfies the deep rooted hunger for love and meaning
 - Gives us strength to keep going, like Elijah
 - But then the dialogue shifts, and the crowd that was hungry for bread and life goes quiet
 - And the crowd that already thinks they have it starts to speak up
 - Even after the miracles, after the reminder of God's provision and abundance and ability to feed body and soul
 - They cannot accept that this man standing before them is the one that God has sent
 - The one that can give them everything they need and more
 - The one who is offering not only abundant life today, but abundant life in the next life too

- And notice the Jewish opposition began to complain... no way, they said- this guy is the son of Joseph!
- He did not come down from heaven, he is just a regular guy who grew up here
- And Jesus tries to tell them that this bread, this bread that gives life and life everlasting, this connection back to our creator
- The potential for our own becoming- it is fuel for the transformation
- It is Jesus, it is his body, his blood, his whole being, and everything he has come to teach us
- Jesus then tells us of a hope that we have as people of faith, people who have accepted this gift of spiritual sustenance and transformation
- A reading that is very common at our funeral services, in fact
- Jesus reveals that our becoming, our life long movement toward God and to what God has created us to be
- Continues even after this life is over
- That death is something different for us now, just another step along our path
- One more transition toward what God has been working on for us all along, moving us toward: a reunion with our creator
- Death, it turns out, is the last chapter of our becoming.
- “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51)
- It is not always the best moment at a funeral to dive into all of the reasons that I believe in a Christian afterlife
 - But what a gift this morning!
 - Because the reason that I am convinced that there is an afterlife is right here in these readings
 - It is because of what I believe about God that finally makes the afterlife belief inevitable
 - It would be harder to disbelieve for me than to acknowledge that us returning to our creator after our death is the logical thing
 - It's just like Elijah- seeing God feed and nurture him, and encourage his becoming into the prophet he grew to be
 - The prophet so great that, along with Moses, carries the law and the prophets
 - So important that at a traditional Seder meal, a cup of wine is poured for him³

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover_Seder#Kos_shel_Eliyahu_ha-Navi_\(cup_of_Elijah_the_Prophet\);_Miriam's_cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover_Seder#Kos_shel_Eliyahu_ha-Navi_(cup_of_Elijah_the_Prophet);_Miriam's_cup)

- And now Jesus, offering the same food of becoming to us, and reminding us that the journey does not end when we die
- Because I believe God loves us so much, because I believe that throughout our lives we are becoming
- God is investing in us each and every moment to bring us to abundant life
- We are offered the bread of life and cup of salvation over and over again because God holds out so much hope for us
- So much hope in what we could and can become
- And the next life is just God's love insisting that when this process of change we call life is over
- We are not simply ended, our life does not blink out of existence, but is preserved.
- We are preserved in our totality, and brought back home
- The belief in the afterlife, therefore, is not an exceptional belief, but a belief in God's continuity throughout it all.
- How could God invest so much in us and then throw it all away?
- Eat. And Become.
 - What we eat changes us. Sometimes it's orange noses
 - Sometimes, when we come to this altar for the bread of life, it changes our souls, and our whole being
 - The whole sacramental life is a process of metamorphosis, I think, slowly choosing to be transformed and to become something new
 - Something God has had in mind for us the whole time
 - One key component of our time with this holy food, is our time with each other
 - I am fully aware now, after the last two years, of just how essential it is that we come together as a community to partake of this bread
 - It's not really Communion if there is no Community involved
 - It is why we cannot finally bless bread and wine across internet wires and on zoom calls
 - Our bishops decided it was finally too individualist and lacked a certain element of community that is essential
 - You see, when one only prays to God alone, one usually ends up praying to a God who looks a lot like a reflection
 - Community keeps us accountable, keeps us balanced, we challenge it, it challenges us
 - And it then is in the context of us gathered, and with Jesus showing up in our midst and in this bread and wine
 - That we become.

- Over the last three weeks, we have talked a lot about food.
 - We heard about the miracle of feeding the 5000 families with 12 baskets left over
 - It challenged us to consider our own abundance, even when it feels scarce, to give and share of our time, our abilities, and our money
 - Our entire selves, in other words
 - How Church needs our gifts now more than ever.
 - And then we moved a little further into John, and into another feeding story
 - Jesus, following the feeding miracle, tells them about the Bread of Life, and that he is that bread come to feed our souls
 - An invitation to a deeper life of faith and meaning and purpose
 - One capable of riding out the waves of highs and lows this life brings, because it is built on a sure foundation
 - And now we are here, witnesses through these Bible readings today, of Elijah's becoming
 - And of what it is that this bread of life can change us into
 - That it is our spiritual food for our spiritual transformation into what God ultimately wants of us
 - And we must do that, to do it completely, within community
 - Do we long for this bread of life? For this becoming that God offers us?
 - Are we hungry for it?
 - Martin Luther says⁴: "I wish I could get you to pray the way that my dog goes after meat."
 - And D.T. Niles says, "Evangelism is one hungry person telling another hungry person where to find bread," ⁵
 - God is here waiting and offering- Come and Eat. Come and Become.

Amen.

⁴ William H. Willmon, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B Volume 3, 333

⁵ <http://lindynuggets.blogspot.com/2012/08/pentecost-11b.html>