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## My Stack of Bibles

This morning we continue with the fourth installment of the Bread of Life Discourse found in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel according to John.

Some would say what we heard read here today is a 'mash up' of the other three gospel accounts of Jesus' life and his teachings.

Some would even say this morning's text is an 'add on' after the original gospel composition.

Others would say that the message here is not only visceral and gruesome, it's sacrilegious and therefore needs to be rejected.

In fact, this approach seems to be in sync with the response of the "Jews" (aka the religious leaders of Jesus' day) hearing him speak in the synagogue at Capernaum.

I can almost hear them whispering amongst themselves,

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

For me, their whispered skepticism continues to this very day, perhaps, even here now this morning.

Maybe, some of us are already rolling our eyes or nudging our neighbor, whispering to ourselves about having to listen to this uncomfortable text right here and right now.

Worse yet, perhaps some of us here are barely able to stifle our impulse to throw up our hands saying, "See, this nonsense about eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood" and calling it communing with God, it not only reeks of cannibalism, it makes absolutely no sense!"

But, I say to you, hold up a minute!

Sometimes when we're uncomfortable, along comes the teachable moment. When we want to reject what seems unfathomable, it's been my lived experience that is the place our God is most actively at work.

Such moments call us to take another look; to bring an open mind and a sense of curiosity about what's happening.

For surely if Jesus is the Word made flesh; surely if Jesus really did walk the earth some 2000 years ago; surely if Jesus is the embodiment of a

living, loving God; surely if we dare to choose to call ourselves Christian, the passage might be worth another glance?

And if we were to do that, who knows what could happen?

Recently, I quoted our new moderator's dream for our denomination and our church that it might become more enlivened if we were able to focus more intentionally on scripture and on Spirit.

For me, this begins with some intentional commitment to the development of spiritual practices—a willingness to be on the lookout for where God is at work in our everyday living.

Hence the spiritual practice questions that go along with our five week sermon series on The Bread of Life Discourse.

Some of you may have taken note this morning of the image on our projection screen and my own personal stack of bibles arrayed on our communion table.

Perhaps a similar array of bibles might be found at home on your own bookshelves or even here in the church library.

Or, perhaps, not.

Perhaps some of you have long given up thinking scripture anything more than an old-fashioned account of

fictional events recorded a long time ago about our faith ancestors.

Still others among us might view scripture as a body or a tome of literature composed by a privileged group of men about another group of men, with a few women's names thrown in for good measure.

The question begs itself—what does it all have to do with our everyday life here and now?

Wherever you stand on God's Word as recorded in scripture in these post modern, post Christendom, post Truth times, I invite you to take a pause and make space and room in your hearts and minds to ponder your own relationship with the good book.

I invite you to be intentional about wondering which of the bibles arrayed here this morning might be calling to you?

Could it be the somewhat battered copy of my Harper Collins Study Bible used this morning as a base to support all the others?

Could it be the large and heavy Children's Bible Story that comes next?

How about the Ralph Milton Family Story Bible?

Or, maybe you started at the top of the stack and are working your way down?

Perhaps you recognize the two smaller leather-bound bibles that grace the top of the pile?

Perhaps you, like me, were given similar ones as children or young adults?

Or maybe you are wondering about the version of scripture entitled *The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Language*, by Eugene Peterson that comes third from the top down.

Finally, maybe your eye was drawn to the blue cloth bound version, the New Standard Revised version of the bible fourth down from the top and found in most of our church pews?

Whichever one of these bibles might catch your attention, I encourage you to go home, take one of your own bibles off the shelf, turn the page and see where it falls open.

Who knows what could happen?

You might even find yourself discovering a new reading interest.

Or, at the very least, you might find yourself make space in your life to consider the stories undergirding the giving or receiving of bibles that shape your life.

Better yet, in the mix of the ordinary with the divine, you, too, might come to find yourself reveling in a moment of eternity.

You see, our relationship with the foundational texts of our faith tradition matters.

Our relationship with the biblical text help inform our relationship with Spirit and vice a versa.

With all of that as preamble, let us return for a moment to this morning's strange and wonderful text from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel.

Here in this morning's text, we might find ourselves wondering just why is it that Jesus seems to be very deliberating upping the ante, speaking in these scandalous ways about his own body, his own flesh, his own blood.

From my perspective, here, we're invited to chew on Jesus' visceral description of himself as the Bread of Life come down from Heaven; the very embodiment of God's grace and love longing for relationship with us that is so scandalously real, it's almost palpable.

First, however, we need to turn off our inclination to respond from that reactive place of 'ewwww, yuck!

We need to turn off our 'yeah, right', skepticism meter.

For we know that in the clanging noises of everyday living that constantly compete for our attention, Jesus' timeless invitation to abide in God's love can be hard to hear, see, or feel.

Jesus' timeless invitation to abide in God's love can be harder still to embrace.

Jesus' need to turn up the ante, to increase the volume on his teachings at Capernaum was urgent.

He knew that he would very soon be betrayed by false friends.

He knew his body would be shamelessly beaten and his bones broken at the hand of the religious and political authorities of the day.

He knew that he would very soon to be put to death because no one dared speak truth to power.

Still, what was paramount for him in that eternal moment in the synagogue at Capernaum, was to extend the invitation to abide in God's love.

And, it's an invitation as real to us today as it was to those first followers then.

You see, for me, these stories from scripture reach out to us from across the vast space of time and eternity and they remind us that God's got time for us.

My question is this: Do we, in the Church, have time for God?

My fondest prayer in these changing times, is that our answer to this most poignant question is 'yes'.

May it be so, amen.

Note: Some aspects of this morning's reflection take their impetus from a variety of sources including:

- Frederick Buechner, "Wishful Thinking, A Seeker's ABC", Revised and Expanded, 1973, 1993 Eternal Life and Eternity, p.25-27
- The Rev. Scott MacKenna's thoughts and reflections for August 18, 2018 found at [www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk)
- Professor Karoline Lewis, in Bread of the Preaching Life found at [www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3661](http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3661)
- Cosmic Bread, sermon preached by the Rev. Beth Hayward at Canadian Memorial United, August 9, 2015

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