



We Better Show It

August 22, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Thirteenth Sunday after
Pentecost

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment, Rector
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Oh Lord: May Your Word only be spoken, and may Your Word only be heard; in the Name of Jesus Christ, the Living Word. Amen.

It's been a while since I was a summer chaplain at the Barbara C. Harris Camp and Conference Center. But it was a rich and wonderful experience for the seven or so summers I served there.

One summer, there was a humorous and somewhat edgy story circulating about a boy who had spent a week at Camp. He had been quite uncooperative with his counselors, and, in particular, had grumbled significantly about the specifically religious activities in the Camp.

Somehow, however, for the closing Eucharist of that week, someone had asked the boy to serve as a chalice bearer during Communion. His counselors feared disaster—what would the boy say? What would he do? When his counselors went forward to receive the wine from this boy, he administered the Communion chalice with these words: “This is Jesus. *You better like it.*”

It's perhaps a kindred spirit animating the disciples in today's Gospel: “This teaching is difficult—who can accept it?!”

We are at the end of a five-week deep dive into chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. The text has evoked the mystery of Jesus as the Bread of Life. And boy, is it difficult. It's repetitive. And confusing. And if we are followers of Jesus, on some level, maybe we are supposed to like it. But it's hard.

As quick review: the chapter begins with Jesus feeding 5000 hungry people, then walking on water. It continues with three distinct exchanges between Jesus and his listeners on the meaning of Jesus as the Bread of Life.

The teaching climaxes late in chapter 6, where we are today, with Jesus declaring that those who are really his disciples must eat his flesh and drink his blood. John's Jesus speaks in more graphic language even than the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Those Gospels give us Jesus' words for the prayers that are said over the bread and wine Sunday after Sunday. We'll hear them in a moment, from Jesus' words at the Last Supper: “Take, eat, this is my body, given for you...Drink this all of you, this is my blood of the New Covenant.” But the Greek word Jesus uses for “eat” in the Gospel of John this morning literally means to gnaw, crunch, or chew.

All this is worth some reflection, because for the past 40 years in the Episcopal Church, the Eucharist has been the principal act of public worship on Sunday. Each Sunday, most of those present come forward to extend their hands to receive the bread and wine. I hope that every once in a while, we ask ourselves, “What is happening here? Is this Jesus? What does it mean?”



We Better Show It

August 22, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Thirteenth Sunday after
Pentecost

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment, Rector
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Unlike the medieval Roman Catholic Church from which Anglicanism split in the mid-16th century, Episcopalians haven't been primarily concerned with what happens to the bread and wine at the altar.

We've accepted a variety of doctrines regarding the Eucharist, while always affirming that Jesus is somehow present in the bread and wine after the prayers are said over them. More important than what happens to the elements at the altar, however, is what happens to the believer, who, in faith, receives them. In the language of today's Eucharistic Prayer A (which we are using today) the Presider prays: "Sanctify them [that is, the bread and wine] by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him."

But more important, the Presider then prays: "*Sanctify us also* that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, *and serve you* in unity, constancy, and peace."

What's most important is not what happens to the bread and wine, but what happens to you and me. In a wonderful book called *Take This Bread*, Sarah Miles writes of walking into St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. By her own admission, she had no earthly reason to be there. She'd never heard a Gospel Reading, never said the Lord's Prayer. She'd admired the building before as she had walked past. One particular time, she went inside on an impulse, with no more than the habitual curiosity of her vocation as a reporter. As she writes, "Before I knew it, someone was putting a piece of fresh bread into my hands and saying the body of Christ, and handing me a goblet of sweet wine saying, the blood of Christ. And then something outrageous and terrifying happened to me. Jesus happened to me."

She writes that the word "Jesus" lodged in her throat like a crumb. Before she knew it, she had started feeding programs at St. Gregory's, rooted at that very altar (coffee hour there actually happens at the same altar where the Communion had been celebrated), that gave away tons of groceries to hungry people. That first food pantry multiplied into nearly a dozen more pantries. ([Take this Bread: A Radical Conversion](#) NY: Ballantine Books, 2008)

What mattered was what *she* had *become*, and what she *did* because of that meal.

What matters is how *we* are changed by the bread and wine, by the spirit of Jesus present in the elements and in the assembled believers. Are we fed? More important, are others fed through us?

When we go forth to lemonade hour, and then home, are we more likely to speak a kind word, or refrain from speaking an unkind one? Are we more likely to listen first rather than to speak?

Are we more likely to have a conversation that we have been avoiding?



We Better Show It

August 22, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Thirteenth Sunday after
Pentecost

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment, Rector
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Are we more likely to express curiosity about those with whom we disagree rather than contempt for them?

Are we more likely to move beyond our convenience to work for equity and justice?

That feisty boy at the Camp said to his counselors: “This is Jesus. *You better like it.*”

We might say to one another, “This is Jesus; *We better show it.*”

Amen.