

Wisdom's Feast – Niquita Hohm

Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:9-14; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

It seems good to give this passage that can tend to make people squeamish to a new mom, because I don't feel as much of a need to hold it at arm's length this time around. For one, the stuff of bodies is my daily reality. Never did I realize how often my husband and I would discuss what was recently in a diaper, or wear what was recently in a stomach! So I'm good with our dealing with fleshy stuff this week. I hope you're ready for it too. As Barbara Brown Taylor says, "No place that is human is too messy for God. The sacraments teach us to seek God's presence at all times and in all places."

We get squeamish, and it's jarring to hear, *My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink*, but in John we have been dealing with flesh from the beginning. *The Word became FLESH and dwelt among us*. Our Nativity scenes show just the sanitized version of the Christ Child coming to earth, but anytime flesh breaks into our world it is bloody and messy business. Still today, but especially back then, the place where a woman labors to give birth is a dangerous place. It is one of our most miraculous glimpses into God's creative power and our God-given creative power. Brand new life. But it's also a place where we teeter on the brink between life and death. Hannah Shank's book, *This is My Body*, has been so illuminating for me. To our avoidance of the messiness, she speaks a challenge: "If we don't have room within our worshipping communities to ponder the visceral mysteries of God's birth in the world, no wonder we struggle to make room for our own difficult, bloody, and holy moments."

We may get squeamish with this language of consuming flesh and blood, but as people of this earth who can't seem to share it, or its resources, how quickly we forget there are other ways we consume people that are overlooked daily. We consume flesh and blood when people can't breathe under the weight of oppressive systems, when the powers and principalities try to gnaw away people's very humanity. **This** should also make us squeamish.

We may be squeamish, but we don't experience the especially shocking scandal that Jesus' words would have been to his original hearers. Within Jewish law consuming blood was strictly forbidden and consuming blood together with the flesh of the creature was unthinkable, because the life of every creature is in its blood. Obviously this being a human being increases the grotesqueness, and shedding human blood is also forbidden.

Another problem with the flesh AND blood is that it was believed that by consuming them together you would begin to **take on the characteristics** of the animal, so the prohibition makes very good sense. It also makes sense of Jesus' hopes for us in eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

In our Proverb, Woman Wisdom is a generous host, inviting us to her feast. Here the bread and wine lead us away from immaturity into life and insight. One of the most beautiful aspects of this is the multi-generational participation. The Proverbs are, on the whole, a plea directed to the young people of the community, to walk in the way of wisdom. And I can picture Woman Wisdom at many different stages of life, but especially as a grandma, who knows just what to set

out at the table that we will love, who knows the nostalgic aromas and flavors that will draw us back home. Even while we were off sampling the stolen water and secret bread that Folly has fed us, Woman Wisdom has been hard at work, preparing for us true food and true drink.

It is so fitting that Wisdom is personified here, because wisdom truly is embodied knowing. It's knowledge that has gotten up and walked and walked and walked around, and settled in the bones.

It's also wonderful that the body in which wisdom is wrapped is a woman. So often women have been pushed to the side, to drastically varying degrees, depending on the color of their skin. But this is a place where we can be found. Women know, bodily, what it's like to be consumed.

Hannah illustrates this well, so I'll share with you straight from her book:

“My son lunged for me on sight, startling whoever happened to be holding him at the time. He wanted to cruise through my day with me, securely attached to my hip. Even a few inches of space between us seemed intolerable for him. And I faded into him, becoming his voice, his nourishment, his vehicle, his resting place, his teething ring, his comfort, his security—his everything. In the face of so much need, surrender seemed the easiest option, even with the knowledge that it was an unsustainable choice. But it is the choice we expect of mothers, whether explicitly expressed or not. We see the expectation in the comments section of any mommy blogger who dares to write about the taxing nature of motherhood: ‘Why did you have kids if you wanted to sleep?’ We hear the expectation in the grocery store, moments after our child is screaming: ‘Treasure every moment, even this one. One day you’ll miss him crying for you.’ We must enjoy motherhood, treasure it, give ourselves up to it, try harder when we feel depleted, let go of who we were before, nothing matters more than our role as mother. And that’s the message that I heard—that I didn’t matter, that motherhood mattered more than my selfhood.

The words of institution—‘This is my body, broken for you’—used to sound like resignation: ‘This is all I have, and it is shattered to make room for you.’ But we are asked to remember this sacrifice at every meal, with every bite of sustaining food we eat with our loved ones. In that remembering, we approach the words from a different angle. Jesus’ body has been and will be enough, and the offering of a humble human body can change the course of history, exemplifying God’s love and grace for infinity.” (Shank, pp. 78-79)

Mothers give their bodies over in many ways to the growing and nourishing of new life. Mothers and women who aren't mothers also give of their bodies as they care for, work for, fight for, provide nourishment for, break for, grieve and mourn for the members of their communities. And isn't this the place to which we're all called? As Barbara Brown Taylor puts it: “This is the meal we reach out for at the communion rail, caught between our desire to be fed and our certain knowledge that we too are being called to take, bless, break, and give the stuff of our own lives.” But this gets too scary, and also dangerous when abused, which is why Hannah's book helps frame it for me again, in this quote to her child: “If I am courageous and willing, I can allow my whole self to be in every bite of me you can take. And somehow, like the miracle of

Communion, where every bit is the body and blood of Christ over and over and over again, neither of us will ever run out, and both of us will stay full.”

There are times when I get frustrated with all the magical talk about the table. Coming to the table of Communion does not automatically make everything good in our space and time. People are still hungry, injustice still surrounds us. And **yet**, when we come to receive the body and blood, the elements that are infused with Christ’s presence, there **is** a mystical and powerful energy there.

One commentator notes: “What Jesus is offering us is a slice of Life Eternal, of the very Life force that pulses as the heartbeat to everything.” This pulsing imagery immediately took me to [A Wrinkle in Time](#) where we see the potency of a pulse to brainwash and destroy. In Madeleine L’Engle’s story Meg, the protagonist, must rescue her brother, who is taken captive on a planet where people are hypnotized and trapped under the spell of IT. This disembodied brain pulses rhythmically, thinking for all, making all the same. A haunting image of it is when all the children are shown standing in identical driveways of identical houses bouncing a ball to the same. exact. rhythm. Meg’s way out is through radical love of herself, faults and all, and of her brother; this love is the one force that IT doesn’t have.

The pulses of Woman Wisdom and of Folly are constantly beckoning. But the heartbeat of Wisdom, the heartbeat of **Jesus**, calls us to consume the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. May it preserve you, soul and body, (your very own body, just the way it is, broken, bruised and loved) into everlasting life.