

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 23rd August 2015
Trinity 12

We are what we eat.

I am rather partial to a bit of Sushi. My problem with Sushi is that I have been spoilt. A previous colleague of mine just happens to live next door to the proprietor of what some described as one of if not the best Sushi restaurants in London and it just happened to be in Willesden Green. I have also had the joy of eating fabulous Sushi overlooking the shores of False Bay in South Africa. So I am always on the lookout for good sushi. Whilst in the Kings Road last week I noticed Itus, a sushi restaurant chain. And I noticed its strap line, "eat beautiful". Like most strap lines it is clever in loads of ways but it also encourages the diner think this must be good for them.

And that seems to be a bit of a thing about eating today. Making sure what we eat is good for us. I suppose this is where the cliché 'you are what you eat' seems to have some value. Maybe even more true when looking at Western eating habits and the increases in obesity. The over consumption of fatty, sugary and let's admit it yummy foods and drinks leading, some would argue, to quirky, maybe even incomplete or broken diets, consumed by broken or lost people. What we eat doesn't always produce what we hope. The World Health Organisations says: "Obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century. Obesity is already responsible for 2–8% of health costs and 10–13% of deaths in different parts of the (Western) Region." (WHO website 20.08.2015)

We are what we eat. That's what Jesus has been saying in our gospel readings for the past few weeks as we work our way through John 6.

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life". This is often taken as a Eucharistic statement and in many ways it is. Until that is you get to today's reading. He's been talking about being the bread of life and eating his flesh for a fair few verses. Before this passage, at the beginning of John 6 Jesus has fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fish and he has walked on water, yet the people are continuing to look for miracles; Jesus is saying, eat me, receive me as fully and as profoundly as you can and you will be changed, the ultimate miracle. Unfortunately many in the gathered crowd don't understand.

If you stop and think for a moment, eating is perhaps one of the most profound and sensual things we do publically. Eating is sustaining and social. It is one occasion we take something into our bodies willingly and openly and often in company. To eat Jesus means to receive him profoundly and completely; receiving him, receiving his

word, his teaching and ultimately who and what he is, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Receiving him not just as an intellectual or academic process, a nod and a 'I hear you Jesus, catch you later' exercise. Jesus is saying, if we eat him, if we actually, really and truly receive him into ourselves we will be changed, we will be what we eat.

There is a way of speaking or thinking within evangelical theologies that picks up on this idea. These theologians speaking of eating scripture, of becoming the text and we can see what is meant. Receiving the word of God and being changed by it, being grown into the people of God by this spiritual food.

What happens if we devour Jesus? What is this change? A large part of Jesus' teaching challenges us in our life of faith to become more like Jesus. As Christians, through our baptism we are encouraged to become more Christ like. This is Jesus' challenge to Nicodemus in John 3.1-21 when he said we have to be born again. This wasn't a literal suggestion but a call to become something more than we are, to be changed. Being a Christian is being something more than we are, is wanting to be more Christ-like, to strive to be more like Jesus, to follow his teachings more closely.

This isn't easy. Even as he spoke there were some following who said this was too heavy a burden for them to bear and they left. Jesus never said it would be easy, if we listen to him, if we open our hearts to him and take his words seriously. And we don't have to follow. Joshua in our passage today, tells the people of Israel to choose, follow God and His commandments or follow their own ways. We can and should choose.

Gathering around the altar as Jesus' followers we break bread. In the breaking we can share and we can eat. It is in this brokenness; the brokenness of Jesus, of he who hung on the tree of shame for us, he who was broken for us, that the truth of the gospel becomes clear. Then it becomes easy. Peter saw it and understood. His words, "You have the words of eternal life". It is not an easy truth or an easy way under our own steam. It is life changing. It is a truth that says, you who are broken, through this Jesus, can be healed, you just have to receive. What we receive is the love of God poured out for us that we can be made whole, that we can be healed, that we can be renewed, that we can be changed.