

Have you ever heard the expression, if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen? Well apparently, a lot of people these days can't stand the heat, because they are doing just that. Journalist Megan McArdle, in an article for the Atlantic called, "The Joy of Not Cooking," reports that the average woman in the 1920s spent about 30 hours a week preparing food and cleaning it up. By the 1950s, she was averaging around 20 hours doing that type of work. Now, women average about five hours a week in the kitchen.

And that's not because men are stepping in to help, because according to McArdle -- guys give only about 15 minutes a day to kitchen work! Unless you're like me, I do all of the cooking and cleanup at my house! Oddly enough though, the article mentions that gourmet kitchens are on the rise at the very same time people are fleeing the heat. Men and women are spending a ton of money on kitchen equipment that they rarely use.

A Viking stove costs around \$6,000. A Kitchen-Aid series 5 Pro Mixer retails for \$459.99. A Breville toaster oven runs \$189.95. And a Shun chef's knife, with its own wooden display stand? \$149.95. Talk about a list of expensive kitchen equipment, and these items are being purchased at a time when more than a quarter of all meals and snacks are being consumed outside the home.

Ok, so what's going on? McArdle believes that each costly kitchen gadget "comes with a vision of yourself doing something warm and inviting such as: baking bread, rolling your own pasta, slow cooking a pot roast." Gourmet kitchen equipment promises a warm and wonderful feeling, even if you rarely touch it.

Apparently, cooking has become a leisure activity for many Americans, instead of a daily job. And Helen Rosner, the online editor for *Saveur*, says that guys are getting into cooking as a leisure pursuit, and are buying a lot of high-end equipment for the relatively small amount of time they spend in the kitchen. She calls this Dude cookery, and in Rosner's opinion, its' all "fire, blood and knives."

In the gospel of John, Jesus uses a number of kitchen-based images to describe himself and his mission from God. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven," he says, offering a warm, inviting and nourishing image of himself as the bread of life. But then his language changes: "Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." In a flash, the pleasant image of enjoying fresh-baked bread takes a turn for the worse, toward the eating of human flesh. All of a sudden, we are in a world of fire, blood, and knives.

At the beginning of John's Gospel, he informs us that Jesus is the Word of God in human form, "the Word became flesh and lived among us." And we know that this Word made flesh was not destined to live a long and happy earthly life, because "just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Jesus is going to have to be lifted up on the cross, sacrificing his own flesh to bring us forgiveness and everlasting life, to which he alluded in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." Living bread. Word made flesh. Lifted on the bloody cross. Given for the life of the world.

In Jesus' kitchen we find God's recipe for everlasting life. But that kitchen can sometimes get hot. "The Jews" in our story for today begin to dispute among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" When Jesus spoke to them about "living bread," they had a sense of what he was talking about because they remembered the bread from God -- the manna -- that their ancestors had eaten in the wilderness. But his flesh? That didn't make any sense to them!

"Very truly, I tell you," says Jesus, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." His images have shifted from warm bread to something apparently more sinister. There is no longer any doubt

that Jesus is going to have to give his flesh and shed his blood, and that his followers will need to eat and drink his sacrifice. Jesus is giving his whole self to us and is inviting us to eat him up. Just reading or saying that can make one's skin crawl.

Obviously, and we should stress this *to outsiders and newcomers*, the words that Jesus is speaking should not be taken literally! There is no cannibalistic Jewish tradition his listeners would have understood. Not to mention the fact that unless they were part of the priestly order Jews were not supposed to be around dead bodies or blood because animal blood sacrifices were only to offered to God in order to make atonement for their sins. Thus their confusion.

Some of you might remember me mentioning last week that many people in the crowd did not have faith and without faith there would be no understanding. And thus, they were not positioned spiritually to comprehend Jesus' words on a metaphorical level either. So many people, even some of those who were nominal disciples, left Jesus at this point thinking, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it? This guy is nuts!" The kitchen was getting hot, so they left!

Clearly, cooking with Jesus was not/is not easy. This is understandable since kitchens have not always been pleasant places to be. In his book *The Warmest Room in the House*, Steven Gdula writes that kitchens used to be "as close an approximation to hell on Earth as one could find. They were hot, dirty, smelly, dangerous places, and the work done there seemed interminable." Kitchens used to be hell on Earth. That's why Jesus entered the kitchen and baked the bread of life.

Out of such a hell comes the promise of eternal life. Consuming Jesus is not a leisure pursuit, one that can be done just a few minutes a day. Taking Jesus into ourselves is a full-time challenge, one that transforms us from the inside out. After all, "you are what you eat, as we learned in my sermon from last week!" Well, many of us probably have known that catch phrase most of our lives. "Those who

eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life," promises Jesus, "and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. If we take Jesus into ourselves, we are given eternal life. But don't expect to fully and completely understand it. Rather, believe it and be grateful.

After so much talk of flesh and blood, Jesus returns to the image of bread. He says about himself, "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." In the kitchen of Jesus, the ingredients of bread, flesh and blood all mix together. They form an unexpected meal, one that nourishes us spiritually and fills us with everlasting life.

As I was thinking about what this means a thought occurred to me. Here on earth, we need certain things to survive, to live! Shelter, Rest, Relationships, with food and water being the most important, the most vital! In heaven, eternal life means being in relationship with God, the father of life, forever! The way our relationship with God is established and maintained is through Jesus as the living water, he talks about this with the Samaritan woman at the well, and today he calls himself the living bread, the bread of life!

The challenge for us is to stay close to Jesus, receive his nourishment and do his work in the world. This is not a leisure pursuit, one that can be done off and on. Jesus wants us to remain in the kitchen with him, even when it gets hot. There is work to be done and we are all called to do it, but thankfully we don't have to do it alone and God offers us help and guidance!

First, we can begin by **feasting on the words of Jesus**. When Jesus asks the 12 disciples if they wish to go away, Peter answers by saying, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." The words of Jesus remain a source of solid spiritual food for us, whether Jesus is describing himself as "the resurrection

and the life," or commanding us to "love one another." Since Jesus is the word of God in human form, we can always be strengthened by what he says to us in the gospels. His words are trustworthy and true, and he remains for us "the way, and the truth, and the life."

Next, we can be **nourished by communion**, the holy meal that includes the bread of life and the cup of salvation. This is something that we can do each week! On the night before his death, Jesus took a loaf of bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After supper, he took a cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Jesus instructs us to eat and drink of the bread and the wine to remember him, to honor him. Receiving communion is an important way of living in Christ and allowing him to live in us. Through it we receive so many wonderful benefits which we discover in our story for today. Jesus declares, "we will have eternal life, we will be raised by Jesus on the last day, we will remain in Jesus, and he will remain in us, we will live through Jesus, and we will live forever! Not to mention the fact that when we receive communion we are reminded that God often takes what is sinful and evil and turns it into something good and salvific: the execution on the cross; the image of eating flesh and drinking blood; and even us as sinful and evil human beings who have been turned into saintly children of God, and a means for spreading the gospel message to the people around us to our neighbors, friends, co-workers, community.

Finally, we can go out to **be the body of Christ in the world**. Christians who feast on the words of Jesus and nourish themselves with communion become nothing less than the flesh-and-blood presence of Jesus in the world today. We can be the hands and feet of Jesus, whether we are young or old, male or female, white or black, liberal or conservative. None of this requires a gourmet kitchen, filled

with expensive equipment and gadgets. All that we need to do is keep cooking with Jesus, even when things get hot. Thanks be to God Amen.