

**Calvary Episcopal Church**  
Ashland, Kentucky  
Sermon for August 19, 2012 ~ Proper 5B  
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An expression sometimes used in courses in preaching is the expression “flesh it out.” To “flesh out” a sermon is to take the bare bones, the essential and central message, and give it color and life – to make it “real.”

Such an effort presupposes that there is something sacramental about preaching because one seeks to take that which is abstract and by painting word pictures relating to the real world of experiences known to the listeners, the Word becomes flesh. Entering into a sort of dialogue, the preacher and the listener engage in the process of *realizing*, making real, the unseen and the silent.

One name the City of Rome deserves is the city of statues. You cannot walk for long in the streets of Rome without encountering some marble character to remind you that you are only a freshman in the school of history. Some of these characters in stone are playful, some are fierce; some are beautiful, others are ugly; some are sensual, others are spiritual.

There is a story about a sculptor in Rome who was working hard with his hammer and chisel on a block of marble. A little boy who was watching him saw nothing more than large and small pieces of stone falling left and right. He had no idea what was happening. But when the boy returned to the studio a few weeks later, he saw to his great surprise a large, powerful lion sitting in the place where the marble had stood. With great excitement, the boy ran to the sculptor and said, “Sir, tell me, how did you know there was a lion in the marble?”

The art of sculpture is first of all the art of seeing. The image of the sculptor offers a beautiful image of the meaning behind the idea of “fleshing out” a sermon, which is a witness to the invisible Word of God. It is also an insight into Jesus’ words concerning himself as the Incarnate Word and the Living Bread: Whoever wants to bear such a message must first see the invisible and feed on the intangible.

This is what the Savior invites us to do, especially when we accept his invitation to come to his table and feast. To contemplate the mystery of the Eucharist – that in this experience God not only nourishes our individual bodies with this food and drink, but the Church, the Body of Christ, as well.

Our passage today from John’s gospel is a Passover story. According to John, Jesus did not simply *keep* the Passover before his death; he *was* the Passover. He did not simply *eat* the Passover meal; he *was* the Passover meal.

Our language is pressed to the limit to find the bold analogy for expressing the continuing relationship of believers with the living Christ. So, we have an invitation from Christ to a banquet, which is a tangible expression of the meaning too deep for words. This banquet “fleshes out” the substance of the gospel message of salvation.

By making himself real to us in these mysteries, by “fleshing out” the invisible Word, he makes common bread and wine to become uncommon, extraordinary. He does this so that we may become living bread to the world around us, which cries out in hunger.

Here at this table we receive a vision. And it is a vision with a purpose – that we make the vision real, that we go and “flesh out” the vision for others, just as Jesus Christ did with the hungry multitude on the hillside, in the synagogue at Capernaum, and everywhere he went.

Each time we gather before his table, he offers himself as both the Banquet Giver and the Banquet. The two central requirements for those who come to this table are that they believe in his unseen presence and desire to really live the life he offers.

For the Christian, this world and everything in it have become sacred, infused with an unseen dimension because in Christ’s Incarnation, he has become a part of it and it has become part of him. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” He was and is the “fleshed out” Word of God.

He has fleshed it out again here in this Holy Eucharist. As we feast in him, as we rise and act out his word, may he use our outward eyes to behold the outward bread and wine in such a way that we may with the inward eye of faith behold the Flesh and Blood of our Lord – the unseen, but very real presence of the Giver of Eternal Life.

The word “Sacrament” means *sacred oath*. And this is his sacred oath to us as we gather for this feast: “The one who eats this bread will live forever.” And, as he “fleshes out” his life for us in this Sacrament, he calls us to “flesh it out” for others who are hungry. We receive the Sacrament so that we may become a Sacrament. And we become a Sacrament so that all of life may become a Sacrament, Christ’s sacred oath for the redemption, restoration, and resurrection of all creation.