

Sunday, August 16th
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 15
Sermon by Christy Stang

When we take communion each Sunday, we are metaphorically filling ourselves with God by eating the bread and drinking the wine. Jesus doesn't want us to take his words in this passage literally, however, as the Jews do when they say "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" because it's not the physical act of eating and drinking at communion that really makes a difference in our relationship with God. It's how we approach our lives that truly fill us with God. How do we make the metaphor of the Eucharist come to life for us? Coming back for seconds at communion won't do the trick. We need to shift communion from being only at Sunday worship to becoming a part of the rest of our lives as well.

There are many practical ways to live out the principles of communion in our lives. Prayer, reading the Bible, and being in community with other believers are all things that fill us with God. Listening to God and serving others fill us with God. Like a powerful beat at a rock concert, if you set a rhythm of God, a schedule of habits to draw you closer to God's presence in place in your life, you will begin to feel God's rhythm in your chest. There are many options, because God fills each of us in different ways. Actions are a concrete way to fill our lives with God, but more important than any action is a shift in our perspective.

Our mindset toward God is more important than any practical action could ever be. Back in March I interviewed some of the Episcopal delegates to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women conference in New York, and at the end of the video chat interview, we all said the Lord's Prayer together. It was a way for us to be reminded of what and who drives us, and a way to realign our perspective with God before we headed back out into the world. That was powerful getting to say those words with such influential women, and I could feel God's energy around all of us even though the interview was long-distance.

The things that matter to us stick in our subconscious and become the default for our thoughts. If God is our priority over all else and if He is more important to us than anything else, He will begin to influence our thoughts and actions, sometimes without even a conscious effort on our part. Include God in your decisions, even the smallest ones such as what book to read or what to say to a friend, and He will fill you. This doesn't

mean we always have to be at church or praying. We can pray with our lives by doing everything for the glory of God. Living for God is the best way to give our lives God's essence. When we focus on God and put our trust in God, He enhances all other areas of our lives, giving us more love and more energy to share and to use.

Trust is key in knowing God's abundance. Trust that God will teach us how to be open to letting Him fill us. When people in the Bible are filled with the Holy Spirit, like in the Pentecost story or whenever the prophets receive a message from God, the only thing God needs from them is trust. If we can't trust God, we won't be able to open ourselves to His abundance.

Some of the most powerful moments when I've felt filled with God in the past have been in this faith community, and a strong faith community is a powerful tool in saturating our lives with God. God is inside each one of us, making us one step closer to filling ourselves and our lives with God, and we are reminded of this when we are around each other in a community. At ECAD—Episcopal Creative Arts Day camp—back in July, I was telling the story of the Good Shepherd and World Communion, and the story ended with a bunch of wooden figures standing in a circle around God's table. One of the little girls tapped my shoulder and asked, "Where's Jesus?" as she pointed at the painted figures. I explained to her that since Jesus comes to us now as the Holy Spirit, a part of Jesus was inside each one of those little people standing around the wooden table. She looked at me with wide eyes and breathed, "Whoa." God created us in His image and each of us holds a piece of God inside of us because we are His children. Just the fact that we are in God's circle begins to fill us with Him.

The Eucharist is a reminder to trust God and to shift our perspective to include Him in our everyday lives. Taking communion each Sunday is a tool to help us remember that Jesus has sacrificed himself for us so that we can live and be filled with Him. Communion is not meant to be an isolated event, but is meant to inspire us to take action in filling each day of the week with God. As we share Christ's body this morning, let us remember that we are all together in God's circle, and He is waiting to fill our hearts as soon as we set our minds on God and allow ourselves to trust.