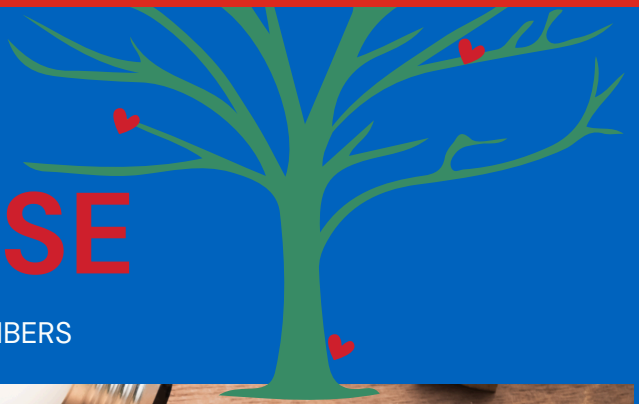


Abide in **LOVE** Live with **PURPOSE**

STEWARDSHIP 2025 | WEEKLY REFLECTION FROM OUR MEMBERS



FACING THE DISRUPTIVE LOVE OF CHRIST

BY DANIEL MILLER

The verses in John 6:56-69, where Jesus speaks of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, are some of the most jarring in the New Testament. His visceral and unsettling imagery left many of his followers grappling with disbelief and confusion. As a contemporary Christian, I'm able to interpret such readings with both the benefit and detriment of thousands of years of context. But if I ignore that context, if I don't just wave away the obtuse and grotesque words He said in that moment, how do I interpret this scene and square it with all the other gospel scenes and teachings of Jesus?

One lens that I enjoy deploying is that of Jesus acting as a trickster figure like those elucidated by Lewis Hyde in his 1998 book *Trickster Makes This World*. According to Hyde, trickster stories "[leave] the listener not so much freed from all constraints as freed from their tyranny and therefore more flexible and open to change. The teller of the tale offers...open-ended symbols into which any listener can pour her own drama of transgression and containment and explore its possible resolutions...It is not so much that trickster unifies the soul as that his polytropic commerce puts its powers in touch with one another across their necessary divides."

The trickster doesn't just impart knowledge or doctrine; He disrupts. He challenges us to confront what we would rather ignore.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 25 GOSPEL READING

John: 6: 57-69

Jesus said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 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." He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

In this scene, Jesus forces us to wrestle with the uncomfortable idea that abiding in Him is not a passive act. It's a radical, all-encompassing union that demands everything from us, a union that transcends the merely intellectual and ventures into the realm of the visceral, the real, the lived experience of faith.

One of the central challenges of Christian life is the love for the Other—the people, ideas, cultures, and institutions that lie beyond our own experience, that challenge our sense of self and our understanding of the world. The Bible, philosophy, and psychoanalytic theory are all filled with stories and theories about how we cope with the Other and often suggest that real love is when we're able to reach across the divides that separate us. That chasm is often fraught with trauma, prejudices learned below the level of consciousness, and simple ignorance. When Jesus puts on His trickster hat, He throws us into that divide. Instead of reading our autobiography into the text, our context permitting a wave of the hand and a shrug, He forces us to contend with it.

In John 6, Jesus doesn't allow us the luxury of easy answers or comfortable interpretations. Instead, He pushes us to confront the raw, unsettling reality of what it means to follow Him, to love as He loves. He forces us to grapple with the messy, uncontainable nature of divine love. With this lens, his teaching isn't just about the Eucharist or a theological point but is challenging us to confront what it means to love as He does—love that requires a willingness to engage with the uncomfortable, the unknown, the Other. This is the trickster's gift: to break us open, to shatter our complacency, and to invite us into a love that is as challenging as it is transformative.



Daniel Miller has over 20 years of experience in technology and entrepreneurship, helping companies deliver software that truly impacts their customers. He's also an educator, songwriter, storyteller, and an advocate for the IndieWeb movement. He's been married to Carissa Byers for 13 years, and is the proud father of Margot, Lucy, Milo, and stepdad to Penn. When not writing on his website about philosophy, bicycling, music, or the internet, you'll likely find him out on a bike ride or crafting his next story.