Flipping through the channels the other day I came across a show called *The Secrets of Skinwalker Ranch*. And while it sounded like what would have happened to Annakin Skywalker’s name had it been garbled coming through Ellis Island it was actually about a place in Utah where mysterious things were afoot. As best I can tell the hypotheses was that somewhere on the ranch or perhaps above the ranch there was a portal to another dimension or world and that this portal provides a way for aliens to regularly pop by in order to pester cattle and occasionally shape shift. The evidence for this seemed to consist mainly of some old stories, a guy’s iPhone temporarily going kerflooey and some cows getting nervous. And while it is hard to refute evidence like that, I bring this up not to discuss whether or not there is a shortcut to a galaxy far far away lurking in northern Utah. I bring it up to talk about portals and links between two worlds because in many ways that is what Jesus is talking about today. And please bear with me for a minute because this will all eventually kind of make sense at least I hope so.

Today Jesus says, “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.” It is pretty hard for any non-Baptist to read this and not think about the Eucharist and so that is exactly what we are going to be talking about. If you want a road map for today’s sermon, we are going to discuss the Eucharist and what we believe happens within in the context of what Jesus says today and then we will make our way back to the aliens living in Northern Utah.

So, let’s start with the Eucharist. We do it every Sunday and Wednesdays if you are so inclined. So why do we do it and what do we believe happens when we receive it? Well, I am glad you asked. It is a fairly straightforward answer for what we believe as Episcopalians but this answer exists inside Christianity, where there is a lot of variety on what people believe happens. And so it might be helpful to put the Episcopal belief within this context. But in the interest of brevity, I am just going to look at the poles which go from Protestant to Roman Catholic. On the extreme Protestant end you have a position which basically says we have Eucharist because Jesus told us to do it. The main point of the Eucharist then is to show Jesus that we are obedient. An extra layer is sometimes thrown on which is slightly less on the pole and is known as the memorialist position which says we do it mainly to remember Jesus. In other words when Jesus says “do this in remembrance of me” that is the main point. We are to think nice thoughts about Jesus while doing it. If you are curious who holds such beliefs, broadly speaking it would be those who call themselves Baptists or non-denominational. On the other end the spectrum is what we find in the Roman Catholic Church which basically says when Jesus says “this is my body” he literally means this is my body. Meaning that when one receives the Eucharist, they are actually eating the body of Jesus and drinking the blood of Jesus, not symbolically but literally. You may ask how it is the literal body and blood if it still looks and tastes like bread and wine. And I know this is a bit of a rabbit trail but I want you to leave here a little smarter than you came in. To answer this question, we have to go to Aristotle and the way in which he understood reality. As a caveat I should mention that if you don’t want to be a little smarter you can zone out for the next thirty seconds or so. Aristotle in distinguishing what a thing was said it had two properties – the accidents and the essence. Accidents are characteristics of something that do not affect the essence of something. So let’s say you have two clear liquids one is water and since we are Episcopalian the other is gin. The accident of it is that they are both clear liquids but the essence is that one is water and one is gin. The essence of each is not predicated on the fact that they are both clear liquids. Hopefully that makes sense. So in the Eucharist the Roman Catholic Church says that it is the body and blood even though the accidents remain. So the fact that it still smells, looks and tastes like bread and wine does not matter because its essence has changed to the body and blood of Jesus. Okay so if you have tuned out it is time to come back.

So now what do we believe as Episcopalians? In the Eucharist we believe in something known as real presence. What we basically say is that Christ is truly present in the bread and wine. The distinction we make from the Roman Catholic position is that we do not spell out exactly how it happens. Whereas they say Christ is present in the Eucharist because it is actually his body and blood, we say Christ is present in the Eucharist because Christ is present in the Eucharist. Which means it is kind of a big deal. There are larger arguments about how we come to this position but let’s just leave it at that for now because we really need to get back to portals and Skinwalker Ranch.

In this show the belief was that you could reach through some sort of hole and end up somewhere else. Like walking through the front door of your house and ending up in Cleveland. This is much the same as what we see in the bread and the wine. It is a place where the earthly and the heavenly are linked. We don’t come up here every Sunday for a tasty snack before brunch, we come up here every Sunday because we are being filled from another place. Remember Jesus says, “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 Gerard Manly Hopkins’ poem *God’s Grandeur,* he says, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” That is what the Eucharist is like it is charged with the grandeur of God because it is the bread which came down from heaven. In some ways it is like a hand coming through a portal and pulling us up to God. For the fact of the matter is we cannot work our way up to God but must rely on God’s grace to bring ourselves in communion with him. The sacrament of the Eucharist is a vehicle through which we bridge the divide between the heavenly and the earthly.

When things become routine there is a tendency to forget about them or take them for granted. Think if you transported someone from two hundred years ago to your house. Think how they would marvel at things as routine as light switches and air conditioning and yet we don’t pay them much mind unless they stop functioning. When we take the Eucharist, we need to be like that person from two hundred years ago marveling at the wonder of it all. Marveling that we worship a God who cares so deeply for us that he instituted a sacrament which bridges the divide. Which brings heaven down to us and fills us with the grace of God. The Eucharist is a really big deal because God is present in it. We need to approach with reverence, awe and wonder so that we may be filled with God’s grandeur, with God’s grace and with God himself this day and forevermore.