

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 11B (Proper 14B)
August 8, 2021
John 6:35-51

Eating the Bread of Life

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the Bread of Life, the only Savior of the world.

On another occasion, when He was tempted by the devil, our Lord Jesus quoted the Old Testament when He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4 quoting Deut. 8:3). And that is most certainly true. The Israelites did not survive in the wilderness for 40 years simply because they ate bread. It wasn’t the bread itself that sustained them, but the Word and promise of God, and His faithfulness to His Word. They endured and survived because God had provided manna, bread from heaven, every morning. And that bread sustained them for their journey, though they did grumble about it. Likewise, in today’s Old Testament reading, God provided Elijah with a “cake of bread” to sustain him on his journey to Mount Horeb. Elijah had been fleeing the murderous threats of Queen Jezebel, and was bemoaning that he was all alone and that he just wanted to die. Yet, God did not grant that wish, ever. Rather, He gave him what he needed and sent His angels to give Elijah food for the journey. And Elijah never did die, but was taken to heaven in a whirlwind.

As the children of God, we need a diet full of Bread - the true Bread from heaven. And as we eat this Bread, by faith and by mouth, we live because *that* Bread is God’s Word made flesh. To survive and thrive in this wilderness, we need to eat the Bread of life so that we may complete our journey through this life and reach our promised land. In truth, Jesus came to give you Himself, the true Bread from heaven, the very Bread of Life, to sustain you, body and soul, now and forever.

Now as God fed the Israelites with manna for forty years, and as Jesus fed the 5,000 with only five loaves and two fish, we know that He is most generous in giving us the Bread of life. He wants you to eat in abundance until you are filled. Then He wants you to return whenever you hunger again, whenever you need His forgiveness. He wants to so fill you with the forgiveness of all your sins that you desire to receive it with eager joy. He says in Psalm 81 “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it” (Ps. 81:10).

And that’s what He offered to the Jews as well, but they “murmured against Him.” Rather than receive the gift of “living bread” that Jesus offered, they grumbled that Jesus had said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” You see, they didn’t want to believe that this Jesus was

the Messiah God had promised to send. They didn't want to hear about Jesus having come down from heaven because it was so contrary to their way of thinking. It didn't make any sense. For the man who stood before them didn't look any different from anyone else. As far as they knew, Jesus was the same as they were for they knew his father and mother, or so they thought. They refused to hear and learn from Jesus because they hungered for their own righteousness. They relied on their own reason and strength.

But their inability or refusal to believe doesn't change the truth that Jesus *had* come down from heaven. Jesus is the true Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. He is fully and completely God in human flesh (John 1:14). "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). He is "very God of very God, begotten, not made." Yet, to the eyes of the Jews and all unbelievers, He was a mere man and nothing more. They were offended by what could be called "the scandal of familiarity." They were familiar with Jesus and were scandalized by His claim to have come down from heaven.

And we often suffer from the same problem. For as we come into God's house we don't always recognize that Christ is here to give us His gifts. It doesn't appear that anything at all is happening here. For we only have the preaching of repentance and Christ crucified and risen. We only have ordinary water and words, bread and wine. To the human eye, it doesn't appear that anything particularly special is going on in this preaching or in the sacraments. Our fleshly reason sees the same liturgy, same Bible, same pastor, saying the same words, wearing the same vestments, and wonders how something so familiar could actually be all that important.

And yet it is! The Father, the holy One of Israel, is here drawing lowly and miserable sinners to Himself through His Son. What a gracious God we have! One who desires that no man, no woman, no transgressor, should perish, no matter how vile his or her offenses. You, who don't need to look far to find the ugliness of your sin, are dear to God, and He deigns to save you, to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify you. And this is most important! For no one, I repeat, no one will be saved unless God does it. We don't "draw" ourselves. We don't save ourselves. Rather, God draws us to Him and He saves us from our sin and from death.

So, He is here in this preaching drawing you to Himself. For through the preaching of the gospel, you are "taught by God," and as you "hear and learn from the Father," you come to Christ. For "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). This is the reason the Father sent His Son into the world. He wanted you to be reconciled to Himself and live with Him forever. And how would this come about? This Jesus would give His flesh "for the life of the world." Out of His great love and mercy, Christ would show compassion to "those without a shepherd." He would willingly give up His life for all mankind as He lay down His life on the cross so that all your sins would be forgiven.

And all this so you could know the Father. You see, sin alienates you from the Father. If you were to see the Father without Christ, you would perish forever, for you cannot stand in the presence of perfect holiness. Yet God sent His Son not only to die for you and rise again, but also to teach you. For in Christ, God the Father speaks to you and tells you that He loves you. In

and through the sacrifice of His dear Son on the cross, He invites, He entices, He draws you to Himself. For when you hear that your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake, you are attracted to Him as the loving, gracious, merciful Father He is.

So it is that God draws you to Himself through Christ. He holds out to you the "living bread from heaven." When, by God's grace, you receive this Bread and eat it by faith, you have eternal life, not just in the future, but even now. For Christ Jesus died once and for all, and more than that, He rose from the dead. His life is your life. He is your Bread. And He alone is the source of eternal life. The eating of which He speaks is faith, believing in Him and all that He has done, and continues to do, for you.

And when you participate in His Holy Supper, He gives you His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. The body that hung on the cross bearing the sins of the world, bearing all your sins, is here on His altar to be food for your body and soul. In that body and blood is the forgiveness of all your sins given to you and for you so that you will not die. In that holy meal, you receive the very Bread of life in a very tangible way. By God's grace you taste and see that the Lord is good.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). Yes, my friends, this is no empty promise, for He is here to fill you with His righteousness. He is here to feed you the Bread of Life. So eat this "bread which comes down from heaven." Believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Come to His table to receive that very Bread into your mouth. For when you do so in faith, you will not die. Rather you will live forever. For the One who gives you this Bread is "the living bread which came down from heaven." And He will raise you up on the last day to the glory of His holy name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener