

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 11B - Proper 13B
August 4, 2024
John 6:22-35

Eating the Bread of Life

Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:32-35 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

We prayed in the Collect of the Day, "Merciful Father, you gave your Son Jesus as the heavenly bread of life. Grant us faith to feast on him in your Word and Sacraments that we may be nourished unto life everlasting." That prayer encompasses today's readings, and gives us focus. It names Jesus as the heavenly bread of life, it tells us where we can find him, and it puts this beautiful prayer on our lips, "that we may be nourished unto life everlasting."

Man's most basic necessities are food, clothing, and shelter. If we have these we thrive; but if any is lacking, our days are numbered, and we perish sooner rather than later.

Of these, food is the most important. In the right climate we might conceivably survive for a time without shelter or clothing, but never without food. That's how God formed us, and so we need food to live: but not any old thing will do.

There are different kinds and qualities of food. But today we learn something else: that there is food that perishes, like the manna God gave Israel in the wilderness. But also that there is food, that if you eat of it, you will never perish, and never hunger again. Jesus is that food! He says in today's Gospel, "I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never hunger; and he who believes in me will never thirst." (John 6:35).

Now when the Lord says, "I am the bread of life," He means that He is the bread who IS life, and GIVES life to men. When we speak of Jesus as bread we need to think of sin in terms of malnourishment and starvation. And our sins have just that effect. They diminish our strength of body, mind, soul, and spirit. They cause us to hallucinate and deteriorate when we need to be strong and clear-headed. They harm everyone about us, and in time they kill us.

And so if we eat the forbidden fruit of sin, which unfortunately we love to do, we will perish. It may seem delightful for the moment, but it is tainted food that will sicken us and take us to a fiery grave.

What food, then, must we eat if we want to live, if we want to satisfy our otherwise insatiable desires, and to never hunger again? We must eat the Bread of Life. We must eat Jesus, who is the Bread come down from heaven. (John 6:41).

Does that sound odd? If so we must take it up with Jesus who says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." (John 6:53-56).

These words have always been controversial. Many who had followed the Lord up to that time left Him because of them. Nonetheless, Christians take these words quite literally, because to "come to Jesus" and "believe in Jesus" is not merely a matter of volition, mind, and will, though they are involved.

We do come to Jesus by hearing His words with our ears and believing them in our hearts, though such believing is God's work in us. We consciously and intentionally put our trust in them by God's power. We recall them whenever sin, death, and Satan assail us. Whenever life shocks us, terrifies or threatens us we remember the Lord's words to St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you." Moreover we study them, worship by them, preach, pray, and glory in them.

Indeed, it is the reason we welcome the hearing of the Gospel lesson with Alleluia's and stand up tall and strong to hear it. And why we surround these sacred words with versicles, "Glory be to thee O Lord," and "Praise be to thee O Christ."

But when we speak of Jesus and His Words as Bread it isn't only a metaphor. It is a reality, a fact. Jesus Himself comes to us dressed in these, covered, if you like, in these. In Bread and Wine. His Body and His Blood. This is what we learn in the catechism. "What is the Sacrament of the Altar?" "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine, given for us Christians to eat and to drink."

And so in today's Collect the church prays, "Grant us faith to feast on him in your Word and Sacraments." That very Lutheran phrase "Word and Sacraments" is a summary of where we find Jesus. We find Him in baptism, in absolution, in the Lord's Supper, and in the teaching and preaching of Scripture. And so to come to Jesus means to seek, and receive, all of these blessings.

And to what end? Again in the words of our Collect, “that we may be nourished unto life everlasting.” That is our hope, our desire, our faith, and our prayer, “life everlasting,” because we are made for life. Made to live. What is the evidence?

If we cling so tightly to this harsh life of ours, marked with so much struggle and sorrow; what can we say of glorious and everlasting life? Of life IN God and WITH God? How much more do we desire it? How much more do we “look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.”

Our Collect calls this present assembly where Word and Sacrament are administered, a Feast. And so it is! It is unlike any other gathering on earth. But even it is only a “foretaste of the Feast to come.” That will be the Feast of all feasts. A festival of Gladness and Joy that will never end, and of which we will never grow tired. We will be satisfied in every way; and never hunger again.

What more can we say on the subject? Only what St. Paul writes in today’s epistle; that this Word, and these Sacraments, that God so richly bestows upon us today are Jesus; are the Bread of life; and by them we will most assuredly attain “the unity of the faith; the knowledge of the Son of God; mature manhood; and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13). Alleluia, and Amen.

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

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener
Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg
1297 E 900 Ave.
Shobonier, IL 62885
church: (618) 846-8383
personal cell: 330-204-4180

