

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Pentecost 12B - Proper 14B  
August 11, 2024  
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.

Who ever heard of living bread? After all, bread is not alive. Wheat is alive. Barley is alive. Rye is alive. But when it's harvested, it's not alive anymore. When the roots and the grain are separated, it can't grow anymore. And when the grain is ground into flour, then it's certainly not alive. A loaf of bread won't grow fresh wheat. It doesn't sprout or put down roots or do anything that looks like being alive. Live things eat dead plants. But even then, the living things die. The crowds that Jesus talked to in the Gospel reading had just eaten bread and fish. That's dead grain and dead meat. After eating that dead food, they would be strengthened for a little while, but they would still die.

Jesus described the crowds as dead, lifeless, and not having any control over their life. Jesus said that it was His Father's will that He wouldn't lose anything that the Father gave Him, but He would raise it up on the last day. The crowd was, like it or not, as good as dead. Those who didn't believe in Him were hungry and thirsty. Not only did they hunger and thirst, but hunger and thirst leads to starvation and dehydration and death. They were powerless unless Jesus drew them to Himself. Then they would come to Him, but not because they did it. It takes Jesus' work to make dead people alive. These Jews who grumbled against Jesus were the dead ones that Jesus came to save. They murmured that they knew Jesus' mother and father. Jesus couldn't be from heaven because He was Joseph and Mary's son. He wasn't a big deal, according to the grumblers in the crowd. He couldn't bring life, they said.

And you're not very different from the crowd. You think of all the eating that you have done, not just of food, but all the eating of the Word of God, and it starts you wondering, “What's the big deal about Jesus?” You start to look at Jesus like someone who scratches your back and who provides for your needs. You turn to Him for help when you need it, but when you don't think you need Jesus' help, you're quick to ignore Him. When things go right, it's because you didn't need any help. You aren't struggling with temptation because you're that good at avoiding sin. You're healthy because you do such a good job of taking care of your

body. Everything is at peace because you're smart and resilient and you're able to take care of yourself. You're mature and responsible and you handle yourself like an adult. You don't need anyone else to tell you how things should be, not even Jesus. You can take care of yourself. That's what you tell yourself. You don't need to be drawn to Jesus. You don't need the bread of life. Maybe later, but for right now, things are alright. You've got this.

All those motivating thoughts and all that self-confidence make a good looking front, but it's only skin deep. Beneath that veneer of being in control, you're really not. Look at the unpredictability of your life. You can't control yourself, let alone tomorrow. Your health and your well-being are fragile. Your emotions seem fickle, and sometimes you simply feel out of control. You can't provide for yourself, and you find yourself relying on others so that you have everything you need. All those things that you do to be alive and to feel like you're living don't bring you life. The vitamins, the hobbies, the exercise, the food – none of it gives you life. Your problem with sin is terminal. You will die. That's the cold, hard truth. There's nothing you can do about your death but wait.

You share the situation of the prophet Elijah. God had just revealed Himself to King Ahab and Queen Jezebel and all 850 prophets of the false gods, Baal and Asherah. Elijah had put the prophets of Baal and Asherah to death with the sword. But when the queen threatened his life, Elijah ran into the desert and laid down under a broom tree and prepared to die. He was a prophet of the Lord who revealed Himself. Even after Elijah had boldly called on God to send fire from heaven, he prepared to die alone in the desert because he was no better than his fathers. He despaired and it seemed that there was no help for him. Elijah was a dying prophet of the living God. And you, in your sin, are a dying person who looks to the living God for mercy.

That's when Jesus comes and offers life to dying people. Before, people have eaten dead things, and then they die. But Jesus comes and He offers His living flesh to the crowds. That sounds very disturbing. The very idea of eating someone else's flesh bothers us. Cannibalism is a frightening and horrendous thing. But Jesus isn't offering cannibalism here – He has something greater in mind. When Jesus declares that He is the living bread, He is already anticipating His resurrection from the dead on Easter. Jesus doesn't offer the dying crowds His dead flesh. No! He has His miraculous, living flesh for them to eat. He has His resurrected blood for them to drink. This living bread from heaven is better than the non-living manna. Not only does Jesus give temporary strength, He gives eternal life through His living bread from heaven – His flesh. Jesus, the one who would suffer and die and be raised for the life of the world, brings life. Jesus, the crucified and risen one, gives His flesh and blood as eternal food that gives life. Jesus already knows the Easter blessings that He brings.

And even before Jesus promises that He is the living bread, the mercy of God comes to Elijah in the wilderness. Even when he thought that there was no more hope for him, an angel of the Lord came and touched him and gave him bread that had been baked on hot stones to

eat and water to drink. Elijah laid down again, but God wasn't done strengthening His prophet. The angel of the Lord touched Elijah again and told him that the journey was too great for him. Again, Elijah ate and drank from the gifts that God gave him. But that wasn't the end of God's faithfulness to Elijah. Elijah went in the strength of that food and drink for 40 days and 40 nights. From the wilderness, Elijah went to the mountain of God, Horeb, and there, God revealed Himself to Elijah in a small voice. God had not given up on Elijah, but sent him strengthening food and the promise of God's continued presence. This promise is similar to the strengthening food and the promise of God's presence that Christ gives.

But this promise isn't just for the crowds that Jesus was speaking to or Elijah. This promise is for the dying people of Augsburg, Shobonier, Vandalia, everywhere. This promise is for all those who have a terminal sin condition. This promise is for you. Jesus comes to you and He draws you to Himself. He shows you the grace of the Father. Jesus promises to you that His resurrection and His Easter are only the beginning. He has eternal life with Him in store for you. That sounds great for the future – but what about now? Jesus also promises that He will keep His own. He will not cast you out. He will not drive you away from Him. Jesus will not turn up His nose at you or ask you what business you have with Him. Instead, He will strengthen you and He will keep you because you are His own.

To do that, He gives you His body to eat and His blood to drink. But don't start to think that the Lord's Supper is magical. It's not. Those who come to Jesus and those who believe in Him receive His body and His blood. Jesus' gifts in the Lord's Supper cannot be separated from believing in Him. When Jesus gives you His body to eat and His flesh to drink, He calls you to faith. He gives you that faith to believe Him as a gift. He strengthens you through the forgiveness of sins and your faith is increased. It's not a magic trick or an emotional sleight of hand. It's not simply to make you feel better. Here, you receive Jesus Christ your Savior and the life-giving gifts from His hand. He declares that you are His own, and He does it through Himself. It's not because you do such a good job eating or drinking or by being such a faithful believer that you are saved, but by the mercy of Christ. After all, He is your living bread who saves you. 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

