

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 13B - Proper 15B
August 18, 2024
John 6:51-69

Hard Words

So Jesus said to them, "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. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." (John 6:53-55 ESV)

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

Jesus speaks hard words and He speaks them clearly. They're hard words because they go against our reason which has been corrupted by sin. They're hard words because they speak of things we do not by nature understand. They're hard words because they do not leave any room for our thoughts, feelings, or opinions. They're hard words because they speak of spiritual, eternal things, of divine reality. God grant that we hear them, take them to heart, and follow Jesus unto true life now and forever.

Jesus 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." That's a hard word. How are we to understand it?

The first thing it means is to realize that on your own, you have no real life within you. Jesus' diagnosis is correct. Look inside yourself, apart from Christ, and you will find no life there. No life that's right with God. No life that can overcome your sins. No life that can overcome the grave. "You have no life in you." Unless. . . .

Unless that life comes to you from outside yourself. Unless that life comes from God, from heaven to earth and into you. After all, Jesus doesn't speak of ANY flesh, but "My flesh." "He is not speaking of flesh as is purchased in a butcher shop or is devoured by wolves and dogs. Rather, the One who speaks these words is Christ, in whom the entire Godhead dwells. That little word "My" denotes more than mere flesh, for it is the flesh of God who became man and gave His life for us. Indeed, God will be found nowhere else than in the flesh and blood of His Son, the Lord Jesus. So, God is not to be sought or found outside the Person born of Mary, the Person endowed with real flesh and blood, and crucified, died, buried and risen to life. God is to be apprehended and found in the flesh and blood of Christ solely by faith" (Luther, LW 23.123).

So it all starts with who Jesus is. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven,” Jesus says. This man speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum is no ordinary rabbi. His identity, His origin, is one of a kind. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” Jesus is the very Son of God, the eternal Word, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. “I am the living bread.” In Him was—and is—life. Jesus has life in Himself. He is full of life. He gives and imparts life. “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven.”

But why does he say “bread”? Well, bread is often called “the staff of life.” “Bread” is a universally understood way to say, “that which sustains life.” Nourishment, food, sustenance, what you need in order to live—all of that is conveyed by the word, “bread.”

And Jesus had just fed the multitude with bread, 5,000 people from just a few loaves, with plenty left over. This was a sign to show that Jesus came to give life and to give it abundantly. But people misread this sign and were only thinking of free food for their bellies. But Jesus came to give life in the fullest sense. Spiritual life. Life through the forgiveness of sins, healing the rift between us and God. Life that overcomes death in every form: the deadness in our relationship with God and with others; the physical death that cuts our life short at 35 or 70 or 120; and the eternal death that our sins deserve. Jesus overcomes all of that death with His abundant life. Jesus is the true Bread of Life, the living bread from heaven.

Jesus gives us His life and overcomes our death by giving Himself into death for us. “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Christ gave His flesh for the life of the world by going to the cross. In going to the cross, Jesus offered His flesh to the blows of His enemies and the flogging of the soldiers. He offered His flesh to the nails driven through His hands and the spear thrust in His side. His holy, precious blood poured forth and paid the price that we owed but could not pay. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His flesh and shed His blood as the perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of the whole world.

This is the only way to have life. There is no other. “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” Unless you partake of Jesus by faith, unless you receive Him and trust in His sacrifice for your sins—there is no other way to come before God.

Indeed, the faith to which Jesus calls us “consists in Himself as the content and the object of faith. So, we believe rightly when we pin our faith, our thoughts, and our hearts on the flesh and blood sacrificed for us, such that this is our treasure: to eat, to drink, to think of, and to believe in, the flesh; to cleave by faith to the Man Christ and to His flesh. Indeed, such faith is no mere thought, for thoughts are not sufficient. No, our hearts must take hold of and apprehend Christ; we must cleave to His flesh and blood and say: “To this I cling, to this I will

remain faithful. I would rather surrender life and limb. May I fare with it as God wills." (Luther, LW23. 128).

And how do we acquire such faith? Only through the means He has given us: in His Word, in Baptism, in Absolution, in the Lord's Supper, where He gives us His body in the bread and His blood in the wine, to eat and to drink. These are the means by which the Spirit brings us to Jesus and keeps us in Him through the forgiveness of sins. These are the means by which we feed on Jesus' flesh and drink His blood. These are the means by which the Spirit gives us life.

Further, Jesus says, "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." And, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." Notice: "has" eternal life, which is present tense, right now! You who trust in Christ, you have eternal life even now! It's already yours, by faith in Christ. And this includes Wrenlee [who was baptized earlier].

You have eternal life now, and so the little death that we will face at the end of however many years we get—that is not the end. Our bodies may rest in the grave, but there is another day coming. Jesus speaks of this day. His promise for the believer is this: "And I will raise him up on the last day." Even as Christ is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity, so will He raise our bodies, new and glorified forever, on the day when He returns.

So until then, continue to feed on Him through the Means that deliver Him to you. Be nourished by Christ with the life that He gives. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." This is Jesus' promise to you today. He promises to be with you, in the closest way possible, as you journey through this wilderness on the way to the promised land. Jesus even gives—literally—His own body and blood here in this Sacrament. With the bread and with the wine, Christ gives us His very body and blood to eat and to drink. Here is true food and true drink, exactly what you need to sustain your life in Christ.

So come and eat! Come to Jesus and receive from Him! Eat this bread and have eternal life even now. Eat this bread, believe in Jesus, and you will live forever! Amen.

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

