

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 19, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

John 6:51-58 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

53 Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. **54** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. **55** For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. **56** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. **57** Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. **58** This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

“Bread for Ultimate Nourishment”

You sink into the couch after a long, exhausting day, click the remote just in time to watch something that will melt the worries of the day just melt away. Instead, you are confronted with the obnoxious noise of a nutritional infomercial. Not what you want to hear, especially right now. So you pull out your phone and scroll through social media. You’re pleasantly surprised to get an invitation from an old friend you haven’t heard from in a while. But when you click on it, you discover it is an invitation to “like” their food substitute product and sit through a sales pitch for their business. Even when you pick up an old school magazine, you can’t get away from the health food offers. There, on the cover, is a celebrity who just had a baby 5 months ago and now looks like a supermodel after drinking a secret concoction twice a day for 30 days. You too, can look like this on your Instagram account if only you follow the simple diet steps. Never mind you’re not a celebrity with a pit crew of nannies, personal trainers, chefs and make up artists.

We get so tired of these extravagant claims. They seem to be relentless. Old outlandish offers fade only to be replaced by 6 new ones. And we would tune them out if they weren’t everywhere we look. And if they didn’t leave that nagging guilt that we aren’t everything we are supposed to be without following their step by step directions. But what if they are true? What if they can really do what they say?

John chapter 6 follows the miraculous feeding of 5,000 plus people. Jesus follows up on that miracle to teach the absolute necessity of believing in him. Jesus informs those curious crowds **“I am the living bread that came down from heaven.”** (John 6:51) He even tells them **“Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”** (John 6:51) But this isn’t a commercial. Jesus makes promises, not claims; Jesus extends invitations, not credit card offers; Jesus acknowledges criticism and doesn’t ignore it; Jesus delivers real results instead of shame. He charges

nothing, but gives everything. He gives ultimate nourishment for real life instead of heartbreak from disappointing results.

There are some interesting features of John's account of the good news of Jesus. You can look in Matthew, Mark and Luke to find the miracle of the feeding 5,000 recorded. But only John records the teaching Jesus provides right after. I would challenge anyone to read through the entire book of John. It is remarkably plain and simple. Just think of John 3:16. Yet John wrote to people who were already familiar with those other three Gospel records. So wants to supplement what they already know about Jesus with additional actions and teachings from Jesus. So many times we get simple teaching that is actually pretty challenging to absorb. Students returning to school greeted with Algebra during math class can relate. The numbers and symbols and concepts can appear very simple. Yet putting it all together and making sense of it isn't that easy.

In John chapter 6 Jesus makes it very clear who he is. Then he makes a simple promise about what he does. But his words aren't so easy to swallow. What he offers is immediately met with objections: **"Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'"** (John 6:52) In a way, we can understand their objections. We are so conditioned to be skeptical of outlandish claims. We are fully aware they usually promise more than they deliver. It requires more work. The results don't match the before and after pictures.

The people gathered around Jesus can't help but take his words at face value. It seems impossible that he would give them his actual flesh. The mere thought is insulting. We don't have to get crazy, extreme diets to dismiss them immediately. If someone offered you some of their choice, organic tofu, you would probably struggle to find a polite way to decline. If they promised you kale for a tasty snack, you might not be able to hide your disgust. We don't even have to taste it or try it to know we won't like it. We can relate to all the people who won't allow themselves the possibility of even seriously considering those kinds of offers.

If we use some good Bible interpretation principles it can be easy to decipher what Jesus is talking about. John 1:14 gives us this heads up right at the beginning of the book: **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."** In this section Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man. This is a title he uses to point to himself as God's promised Messiah. So Jesus, a divine, spiritual being, became fully, 100% human. There was only one purpose for his humanity: to give his life for a world of sinners. A few verses earlier in chapter 6 Jesus decodes the way to get the eternal life he promises from eating: **"Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life."** (John 6:47)

That doesn't mean everyone will suddenly accept the words from Jesus. Most people treat him the way they treat diet options. We like to keep our options open. If someone finds something that works for them, we probably won't criticize. Good for them. They should stick with whatever works for them. It must be ok, even if we wouldn't bother with all the hassle or sacrifice. Pride kicks in to treat Jesus the same way a six year old refuses to try

brussel sprouts. Pride prevents adopting Jesus as our exclusive diet just the same way you can walk out of a doctor's office after getting alarming test results and a warning to cut out all salt from your diet, but then refuse to make any adjustments in your eating habits. Jesus might be good for you. Jesus might improve your spiritual health. But that doesn't mean we treat him as anything other than one viable option for our spiritual health.

Here's an interesting way Jesus deals with objections and insulted egos. He responds: **"Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."** (John 6:53) Jesus is uncompromising. He doesn't get defensive or combative. He isn't trying to go out of his way to insult or demean. But neither does he back down or withdraw his initial claim. That's because Jesus can't compromise the truth. He knows he is what everyone needs.

He is the essential and vital nourishment necessary for every human being. Jesus offers real flesh and real blood. His real body was nailed to the cross. His actual blood went dripping down from the crown of thorns. Jesus made a true sacrifice of himself at his crucifixion. He gave his entire life. And that life was the life of God's true Son, the Messiah. The life of Jesus was also the life of a genuine human being. Receiving his sacrifice is the way to consume his flesh and blood.

One Lutheran scholar explains it this way: "But the essence of faith is exactly this, that we receive from Jesus, that we abandon all else and let him give himself to us, his blood-bought merits, his flesh and blood sacrificed for us." (Lenski, p. 493) So why does Jesus use the picture of flesh and blood instead of just coming right out and talking about faith? That same scholar gives this explanation: "The point of comparison for eating and drinking is simply that eating and drinking, like believing, is a receiving of the most intimate and vital kind. As eating and drinking receive food to be assimilated in the body, so believing receives Christ with the atonement made through his sacrificial flesh and blood." (Lenski, p. 494)

There's a reason why there won't be a reunion episode for the reality TV show "The Biggest Loser." So many of the contestants who saw success on the show gained back so much of the weight they lost. There is just no way to keep working out 6 to 8 hours each day. Those intense routines caused them to lose muscle along with fat. And the sudden crash from losing more than one or two pounds each week causes a metabolism emergency. The body thinks it is in serious danger or starvation. So no matter how much they continue cutting calories, they keep gaining back weight.

Jesus promises the real results that only he can deliver. He says: **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them."** (John 6:56) He gives the ultimate nourishment of being connected to his sacrifice but also his life. Jesus joins himself to you. Jesus is your life. Jesus is your strength. Jesus is your power for all spiritual activity. Jesus is the center and core of your life. Jesus keeps you in the faith and molds your life after his. Jesus is different than the manna delivered down to the Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus is better than any snack or meal. Hearing God's word in worship on a weekly basis might be a choice entrée, but it's just one trip to the buffet. Participating in an organized Bible study gives us another trip back. Reading God's word in personal or family devotions provides us

with a powerful snack to feed our souls. Prayer and meditation on a chapter or two straight from the Bible adds real muscle to our faith. Joining with fellow Christians to remember the blessings of baptism reminds you that God put you on the right track when he worked forgiveness and faith in your heart through water and word. Gathering with fellow believers to receive the Lord's Supper reminds us of the forgiveness and salvation that only come from the blood of Christ which was shed for you.

Jesus was the one who went through the work for you. Jesus make the sacrifice for you. Jesus just extends the invitation and you receive all his benefits. The life Jesus gives won't wear off or go away. Jesus promises: **"Whoever eats this bread will live forever."** (John 6:51) This isn't some gimmicky or outlandish claim. This is the ultimate nourishment that can only come from Jesus. Amen.