

Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, August 12, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

- John 6:51

This morning we continue digging into the Bread of Life Discourse from the 6th Chapter of Saint John’s Gospel that follows the feeding of the five-thousand. Last week we heard how faith in Jesus is God’s work in us, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”* It’s God’s gift to us, and His promise. Therefore we don’t need to worry if our faith feels weak, or seems small. What matters is not the amount, or the feeling, but the giver and His promise.

We also heard the Lord make the claim to be *“the bread of life.”* The crowds followed Him, they even wanted to seize Him and make Him king, not because they believed in Him but because He had fed them – 5,000 plus with only 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus promises to give them, and us, bread that doesn’t just fill our bellies for a day, but that *“endures for eternal life,”* in other words, bread that gives eternal life. He is that bread. He is the bread that will give life not just today, but forever. Not just to one person but to the whole world. He is the bread that comes down from heaven so you may have eternal life.

For the crowds who are listening to Him this is a claim too far. Saint John tells us that *“the Jews began to complain about [Jesus] because He said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’”* This claim is a bridge too far for them because they hear in it what we often miss: Jesus is claiming to be God, and to be sent from God. Not sent from God in the way the prophets were – a man suddenly plucked out of everyday life and given a message – but, rather that He has physically come down from heaven, sent by God directly. They know this is what

He's saying because for them "I am" is not just any old phrase – like I am hungry, I am thirsty, etc. – No, the Greek here, "Εγώ εμμι" is the name of God in the Greek Old Testament – in the Septuagint. Moses stands before the burning bush and asks, *"If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"* God says to Moses, *"I am who I am... say to the Israelites, 'I AM' has sent me to you."* When Jesus stands before them and says, *"I am the bread that came down from heaven,"* what the crowds hear is a twofold claim, that He is God and that He has been sent by God.

So they begin to grumble, because to them this obviously is not possible or true, *"They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'"* The Lord doesn't respond to their complaint. His response will be His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Instead He continues, *"No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day."*

Again and again He is going to drive home these two things: that faith in Him is God's work, not ours, and that those who have faith in Him will be resurrected on the last day, on the day of judgment. This is what He has come to do, this is what He has been sent to do: to give eternal life to those who trust Him.

He says to the crowds, *"Whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die."* What He's trying to get them to understand is that as impressive as the manna in the wilderness might be to us, or to them, or to the Israelites in the desert, it's small potatoes for God.

Can God give you regular old food, even from heaven? Sure. And that's great, except you can eat all that regular old bread and you still die. Now God is doing something more profound. He's not just filling our bellies so that we don't feel

hungry. He's isn't just here to fulfill our felt needs. As far as God is concerned the problem we face is deeper than a gnawing stomach and physical hunger. The problem is sin and death. Because we are sinners we sin, because we sin we die. In Adam all sinned, through Adam death came to all of us. That's the problem that Jesus has come to solve.

Which is why it matters who He is. That's why it matters that He is the God whose name is, "I am." "I am" is a statement of life and being. English is kind of poor for getting this idea across, but bear with me. Names in the ancient world are meant to tell you something about the person who bears them. Thus Adam, אָדָם, Adám, means "from the earth." The angel tells Mary and Joseph to name the child who is God incarnate Jesus because Jesus, יֵשׁוּעַ, Y'shua (it's the same name as Joshua) means "*Savior of His people,*" "*for He will save them from their sins.*" So too, "I am," the name of God, means something. It's a declaration of life, of existence, of being. God is, everything else – you, me, the sky, the trees, the birds, from the smallest atom to the largest galaxy – exists only because causes it to exist. God is, and everything else is dependent on Him. God is life, everything else has life because God gives life to it. God is eternal being, everything else has it's being from God. We live and move and have our being because He gives it to us. But if we cease to exist? God still is, God will still be. That's what it means when God tells us His name is, "I am."

When Jesus says, "*I am the bread the life, I am the bread that came down from heaven... whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty,*" He's not just using a nice poetic image, or even some parable-esque way of speaking. He's saying that He is God who is life, and if you want the life only God has, and only God can give – the true life, the life that endures, the life that remains unconquerable by death – you can only receive it through faith in Jesus who is the bread of life.

Which is fine. I mean, so long as it's like a metaphor, right? So long as it's a poetic image, right? Surely this is just a metaphor? Surely this is just a spiritualized way

of speaking? All we need to do is spirit Jesus into our hearts? Right? What Jesus says next tells us this isn't a metaphor, or a poetic image, or a spiritual way of speaking. For Jesus it's deadly serious, for Him it's all very real.

He says, *"The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

The bread of life is the flesh of Jesus? He just means on the cross in some kind of abstract, way, right? Does bread do you any good if you just stare at it in the bread aisle? No. *"The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

As He says, *"This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die."* Again, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever."* Notice that? *"So that one may eat of it!" "Whoever eats of it!"*

This is why it requires faith, this is why all of this - faith, bread of life, eating God Himself - all of it is dependent on God. Who would think to fix the problem of sin and death this way? Who would think to eat God? Who would think that this is the way out of our problem?

Well, how did we get into this mess? By eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now God gives us the fruit of another tree. The fruit of the cross, Jesus. Jesus who is life in the flesh. Jesus who is God incarnate (in carne, in meat).

We got into this mess by eating. We may as well be gotten out of this mess by eating. And that's what Jesus promises you. Eating His flesh, eating Him will give you what you cannot get through your own works: the way out of sin through forgiveness, the way out of death through eternal life, and the way out of the devil's clutches through eternal salvation. Just as sin, death, and captivity to the devil came through distrust and eating; now forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation come through faith and eating of the fruit of the tree of the cross – the flesh of Jesus.

To eat the bread of life, to eat the flesh Jesus gives, to eat Him, is to receive Him and all the promises He has given you. So let's look again more closely at those promises that He has made to you. Look at verse 44, "*No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.*" That makes perfect sense as a promise in Hebrew, and even works in Greek. Not so much in English – because English is one of the few languages in the world in which sentence structure and word order always matter. But listen to this and you'll hear it, "*Unless drawn by the Father who sent me, no one can come to me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.*" Do you hear it? Right there you have two promises – Are you here? Then you have been drawn by the Father to Jesus, and Jesus will raise you up on the last day. That's His promise.

Now, verse 45, "*Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.*" That raises the question when did I hear and learn from the Father? But it's meant as a promise, "*Everyone who comes to me has heard and learned from the Father.*" What is the work of God? "*That you believe in Him whom He has sent.*" Jesus is promising you that because you have come to Him, because you have been drawn to Him, therefore you have heard and learned from the Father.

Again, verse 50, "*This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.*" That's a fine, but abstract, statement. What does it have to do with you and me? This, "*So that one may eat of it and not die, this is the bread that comes down from heaven.*" The bread of life – Jesus Christ – doesn't come down to come down, and maybe you'll eat of Him. He comes precisely so that you may eat of this bread, this living bread, His flesh.

Lastly look at verse 51, "*Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*" Listen to it this way and you'll hear the promise, "*The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh, whoever eats of this bread will live forever.*" Ask yourself, have I eaten this bread? Yes, here at this table, here at this altar.

Everything God has promised you has happened here in this place. Here God has given you the bread of life, the flesh of Jesus Christ crucified for you. Here He has taught you from His Word and you have learned what He has done for you in Jesus Christ. Here He has drawn you to Jesus in holy baptism. Here the Father has done His work in you by giving you the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith in Jesus.

So that you may receive the bread of life, the bread given for the life of the world, the very flesh of Jesus crucified for sinners, crucified for you. So that you may be raised up on that last day. So that you may have eternal life. Amen.