

# Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 19, 2018

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

*"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

We have been digging into Jesus' bread of life discourse in John 6 for the last 2 weeks. Today we come to the very heart of it, John 6:51-58. We left off last week with our Lord saying to the crowds, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

If His hearers weren't scandalized before they will be now. In fact what Jesus says next has even scandalized whole swaths of the Church, even Christians have walked away thinking, "but, He can't really mean that, can He?" But He does.

Upon hearing our Lord say, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh,"* Saint John tells us the Jews started arguing amongst themselves. They ask each other, *"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* It's clear from their question that they understood the implications of what Jesus has said about being the bread of life. There is no doubt in their minds that He is not speaking metaphorically, poetically, or symbolically. They understand very clearly what it is Jesus is saying. How clearly? So clearly that they don't even bother checking to see if it was all a metaphor, image, or symbol. They simply take one look at Him, and understanding basic laws of physics ask how is it possible for a man to give his flesh to others to eat - without dying?

Again, we know Jesus isn't speaking symbolically, He's not using poetic images, or metaphors, because in asking "*How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*" they've given Jesus the opportunity to clarify and walk back what He has said.

But Jesus doesn't. He doubles down. He says 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.*" And He makes us this promise, "*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day...*" That raises a new question, not only do we need to ask, "*How can this man give us His flesh to eat?*" We now need to ask, "How can eating this man's flesh and drinking His blood give us eternal life?"

Jesus gives us the answer, "*for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.*" But what does He mean? To start with, we need to think about the nature of food. Do you remember the saying, "You are what you eat?" Let's think about that.

There in your refrigerator and your pantry are all sorts of food. You eat them to get the energy, the vitamins, the minerals, all the nutrients necessary for life. But think about all those things. What do they all have in common? Every single last one of them is dead. Something must die in order for you to live. The steak and pork chops you throw on the grill were once living. The flour that makes your bread was once living seeds of wheat, that died, and were harvested to provide you with life.

With the exception of the penicillin growing on whatever it is in that tupperware in the very back - the one no one's dared open in two months - your refrigerator is a morgue for storing dead things. What all the food in our pantries, larders, cupboards, refrigerators, and store shelves have in common is that it is dying, or dead. Which means that while it can keep your life going for awhile it can't give you life forever. After all, "You are what you eat." If you eat dead or dying things, what are you? Dead or dying.

The only way to live forever, to have eternal life, is to eat something which is neither dead nor dying. In other words to eat something that truly lives. In the whole of the universe there is only one thing, one being who truly lives. Who truly lives, without being dependent at all on anyone or any thing? Who truly lives, because He is life, existence, pure being? God. To eat true food, to drink true drink, to have true life - eternal life - we would need to eat God.

So now we need to change the question slightly. "How can God give us His flesh to eat?" Because after all, God is spirit. God doesn't have flesh. But what if God took on our flesh? What if He took on our flesh and dwelt among us? What if God became man, so that men may eat of Him and share in eternal life?

That's what the Gospels say has happened. In Jesus Christ, God has taken on our flesh. *"In the beginning was the Word,"* Saint John says, *"and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God,"* and *"all things came into being through Him... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a Father's only Son, full of grace and truth... grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*

There in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, God who made the heavens and earth, took on flesh and for nine months knit Himself a body, as fearfully and wonderfully made as yours and mine. There in Bethlehem the incarnate God was born of the Virgin Mary, true man, true God, all baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

This baby, God in flesh and blood, Jesus Christ, who cried and pooped and peed, who nursed at His mother's breast, just like us, came into the world that we may have life and have it abundantly. He came to win for us the forgiveness of our sins, to fulfill the law, and to defeat our greatest foes: sin, death, and the devil.

And that is what He did there upon the cross. There, Jesus, true God and true man, took your sin and nailed it to the tree with Himself, and overcame it in His own flesh and blood. He put to death in His own body sin and the law's

accusation and won for you forgiveness. And He buried the whole mess in His grave. Then rising, He trampled down death by death and gave life to you, and to all who trust Him.

But how then to get that life which is His, that life which has been His since before the world began, that life which shall be His forevermore, to you? Not just to get it to you, but to get it to you in a way the neither the devil, nor your sinful self can deny it, dispute it, or argue with it? By attaching His Word and Himself to the most physical of things - bread and wine - food and drink.

See, here in Jesus Christ incontrovertible truths of universe come together: You are what you eat, something must die so that you may live, true life can only come from God who is life. In the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ those truths come together. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who is the way, the truth, and the life, gave Himself to die and entered death and the grave that you may have life, and rose that you may never die, and all this is yours when you eat of His flesh and drink of His blood here in the bread and wine His Holy Supper.

Here, through the power of the same word that brought all things into existence, Jesus comes to you under bread and wine. For this is His promise that He spoke on the night in which was betrayed, when He *"took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'* In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, *'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'*"

He promised you that when you eat this bread and drink this cup you eat His flesh which "is true food" and His blood which "is true drink." You eat and drink Him. And if you eat Him and drink Him, then you become what He is: Holy, righteous, perfect, sinless, eternal, and a child of God.

Here at this table you receive the bread of life; the bread given for the life of the world. The bread given that you may have life, true life, eternal life.

Who is this promise for? Who is this bread of life and cup salvation offered to? It's for you. It's for those who need the life that only Jesus gives. It's for those who need His gifts of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation. It's for you.

It's not for those who are worthy, or who think they are worthy. It's not for those who have kept themselves pure, or think they have. It's for sinners who need forgiveness. It's for the dying who need life. It's for those who know in their hearts and minds that they are indeed in bondage to sin and cannot free themselves. In other words, it's for those for whom the Father sent His Son. It's for those whom the Father desires to draw to Himself, and so Jesus draws you to Him, for through Jesus alone you can come to the Father.

There in the water and word of your baptism, the Father made you His child, forgave you your sin, and united you to Jesus. And just as any loving parents feed their children the food they need, Your heavenly Father feeds you what you need. He feeds you what you need to live with Him: the bread of life and the cup of salvation. Here at this table Jesus comes to you to strengthen your faith, to renew His promises, to continue the work which began in your new birth in your baptism.

And if you hesitate. If you think to yourself, maybe I'm not worthy? Maybe I'm too great a sinner? Or if you think, no, perhaps I'm good, I don't need to come to the table this week? Either way, do as the blessed Dr. Martin Luther says in the Large Catechism, "put [your] hand to [your] chest and ask whether [you] are made of flesh and blood?" If the answer is yes, then come, and hear His promises, "Take and eat, this is my body (my body crucified for your sins) given for you." "Drink of this cup all of you, for this is cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Come and hold out your hand and receive the Living God, the Bread of Heaven, Jesus Christ. Receive Him in your hands, on your tongue, and into your stomach that you may have all that He promises. Above all, so that you may have Him.

Come and eat, for *"unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you."* Come and eat, for *"those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day."* Come and eat, for *"my flesh is true food and blood is true drink."* Come and eat, "for this is my body, this is my blood" given for you." Amen.