**Written Copy for John 6:53-54 “Grumbling About the Only Meal”**

Pentecost 13 Proper 15

August 19th, 2018

**The Text: John 6:53-54**

53 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.

53 So then Jesus said to them: “Truly, truly I am saying to you: if you will not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and will not drink His blood then you do not have life in yourselves. 54 The one who continues to eat my flesh and drink my blood is now having eternal life. And I myself will raise him up on the final day.

**Exegetical Statement**

Jesus is wrapping up His discourse on His identity as the Bread From Heaven = all that is needed for mankind to have life now and eternal life to come. He identifies this Bread as being the giving of His flesh and also interjects the drinking of His blood, both of which prophetically point to His death and resurrection. This analogy centers on the spiritual eating of His body and blood that is only done through faith. This happens whenever we encounter Word and Sacrament. The Lord’s Supper is alluded to as a means to spiritually eat of Him but this is not the central message Jesus is pushing. He clearly points to the necessity of faith in who He is and what He will give; those who eat by faith have life, but those who refuse this gift have no life now and will die eternally. Those who had been disciples following Jesus as a worker and provider of temporal miracles grumble throughout this discourse concerning Jesus claims that He has come from the Father (making Him equal to the Father), can and will give His flesh and blood as food and drink that brings life, and that those who refuse this gift will not have life. As Jesus tells them they don’t and can’t understand these things because the Father must call them through the Spirit and empower them to be partakers through faith. The crowd that followed Him from the other side of the sea turn away and stop following. But the Twelve who have been called by the Father through the Son remain, they believe He is the “Holy One of God” who has the words that bring eternal life. Whom else could they possibly follow after?

**Focus Statement:**

Jesus came not to be the uniting Savior of all faiths but to present Himself as the true meal and drink that provides life now (real life as designed by the Creator) and eternal life to come. His Father calls us and through His Spirit enables us to believe and thus feast on this gift which brings us to faith and keeps us in faith.

**Function Statement:**

**Why it’s important to know**:

People today who hear the Gospel grumble about the same things that the followers of Jesus did: that He is from heaven (God) and that one must eat His body and drink His blood (faith in His death and resurrection) in order to have life now and eternal life to come. They turn away from this truth to follow after a Jesus that they can comprehend according to their own logic, one that does what they want Him to do for them.

**What the hearer should do as a result**:

Eat the true meal that the Father has sent to give life to the world. Believe that Jesus is not one of many ways, or is the meal of my own making for my own purposes but hold fast to who He declares Himself to be and through the continued offering of His meal in Word and Sacrament abide in Him as He abides in us

**Subject Statement: Grumbling about The One and Only Meal**

Verse 66 of our Gospel Lesson says: “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.” Did you catch that? Many of His “disciples”. John is not referring to the Pharisees and the Scribes that would gather around Him to try and trip Him up, dig up some dirt on Him that could be used to disgrace Him publicly or even be grounds for Rome to act against Him. These are followers of Jesus. They followed to learn from His teaching, see/experience/benefit from the miracles that He did. They were genially interested in who this man might be. When you think of “disciples” you think of the Twelve who had left house and home to follow Him. Some of these disciples may have done the same too. But now, after hearing this teaching that we’ve been studying for the past couple weeks known as the “Bread of Life” discourse, they have heard enough. They are turning away from Him and returning to the life and pursuits that they had before Jesus stepped into their lives.

This is the culmination of discontent and grumbling that has been going on under their breaths and being murmured all during Jesus teaching about the Bread of Life. Many had come from the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus had accused them of searching for Him based on earthly wants and desires that they wanted Him to fulfill. He was using the analogy of bread. They had come to see if they could talk Him into doing the “free bread thing” again. Bread was the staple diet and if Jesus could supply it like Moses did every day then they wouldn’t have to work for a living. The Father already provided the bread and daily supplies they needed through their vocations and Jesus hadn’t come to change that plan. Instead Jesus came to provide the bread that was really needed for today and all their tomorrows: real life now and eternal life to come. As Jesus says in **verse 51** “**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.**" His claim that He had come down from heaven hadn’t sat well when He had mentioned it earlier. (verses 41-42) 41 **So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?**" Standing before them is just a man. The man who used to be the boy that Mary and Joseph raised. How on earth can He claim to be from heaven, to be equal with God? Then here He is claiming that He will give His flesh for the life of the world. This gives them a new cause to grumble over: (verse 52) “**The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat**?" They have now moved from grumbling under their breath to an out and out war of words. Perhaps some were pointing to the miracles that He had performed demonstrating the power and authority of God. But others were citing the obvious according to human wisdom: “How can “this man” do such a thing? Give his flesh? To eat? That’s cannibalism. And He thinks that will give life to the world? That’s crazy talk and He’s as crazy as they come.” But Jesus doesn’t back down or soften His answers. He goes on to tell them (**verse 53**) "**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**.” If you refuse to eat and drink of Him, you do not have life; neither now or in the eternity to come. His claiming that He grants life through the giving of His flesh is too much for these followers to believe and so they turn away from Him and head back to the life and the pursuits that had engaged them before they’d heard of Jesus.

And things are no different with the society we live in today. As Lutheran Christians we have no problem with Jesus teaching here in John 6 once we understand that by eating is an analogy for believing through the power of faith, and that His reference to bread stands for the work of salvation that Jesus has come to earth to perform and that He gave His flesh and blood sacrificially for us on the cross. We eat this sacrifice through our faith in Him and His work as being done for us. But for many who live around us in this day and age these things are not given facts.

Now just as the disciples in our Gospel Lesson the majority of Americans agree that Jesus had human origins. 9 out of 10 American adults believe that there was a real man named Jesus who walked the roads and taught the people who lived in Palestine. In fact the majority believe Him to have been a teacher way ahead of His time, especially in the areas of peaceful coexistence, love for people of all nationalities, and promotor of women’s rights at a time when they had none. For these reasons its seems inevitable that He was put to death. But believing that He came down from heaven is another thing. Only slightly more than half of all American Adults agree that Jesus is God (56%). Of the American Millennials (those born between 1981-1996) fewer than half (48%) believe that Jesus had divine origins. These are for some of us our children and for others their grandchildren. But even more troubling regards how society regards our confession that Christ was without sin. 52% of American adults believe that during the time Jesus lived on earth He committed sins just like any other person. If that was the case, then what kind of Bread would He be able to give to anyone. What kind of life could He offer? How would it be possible for His death to forgive my sins if He had sins of His own.

This is why many people today view Jesus on the same level as many of the other religious figures of the past such as Gandhi, Mohammed, Confucius, or any other number of Eastern mystical figures. Perhaps this is why famous Televangelists spend their time giving advice on how to make your life better now instead of how Jesus came to get you through this life to the better life to come. How they claim that what Jesus wants is for you to be successful and happy and prosperous now, when the message that Jesus gave His disciples was the warning: (John 16:33) “**In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.**” Influenced by such preachers whose focus is never on sin or the cross Millennials today have their own idea of who Jesus is and what His mission was or is. Dan Kimball in His book “They Like Jesus But Not the Church” describes from the mouths of many young people he has met outside the Church culture how they see Jesus. To them He’s a great teacher who preached a politically correct message of love and toleration of all people. If He was around today He would stand in opposition to the Church’s persecution of homosexuals, transsexuals, and bi-sexuals. He would stand in the corner of women’s rights and allow women full access to the office of the clergy. He wouldn’t be exclusionary in His preaching but would teach that all major religions lead to the same place. In other words He would definitely have a “coexist” bumper sticker on His car. He would be very upset that the Church that claims His name teaches that all the other religions are wrong. And this movement to reinvent Jesus and His message isn’t just outside the Church. It’s creeping in to the mainline Christian denominations as can be seen in our big sister denomination The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. How many of these would also be turning away from Jesus had they been there? How many in essence already have?

Jesus doesn’t mince words in our Gospel Lesson when He tells them and us: (**verse 53**) “"**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**.” There is no other flesh, no other bread, no other name under heaven, no other source of life now and eternal life to come then He who has come down out of Heaven-God the Son. The very God who was there when the breath of life was blown into Adam’s nostrils when he was created. He is the same God who is the source of life, the WORD which declared “Let there be” and it was. And after the creation of mankind He declared it was “Very Good”. And because mankind has ruined that perfect gift of life through sin God the Son came down and became a part of creation to give His very life to redeem it. To remove the sin and begin the work restoration that starts now in each of our hearts and will be completed in all things at the resurrection. As Jesus tells us in **verse 54 “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day**.” Whoever believes in He who gave His flesh and poured out His blood on the cross, believes that Jesus did that for him, for you, for me. You who believe have the life now. A life that has the restored relationship with the Father. And it comes as Jesus tell us through the Spirit (**verse 63) It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life**. This life that Jesus has to give to us is made yours and mine through the work of the Spirit inside each of us. In these very words of Jesus that link His sacrifice on the cross to the gift of eternal life dwells the Spirit who enables you to do what Jesus says must be done: eat of His flesh and drink of His blood-in other words believe that His sacrifice forgives all your sins, makes you right with God, and earns for you a relationship with Him now that lasts forever into eternal life.

Those disciples of Jesus who turned away were not wrong. This is a hard saying. As Americans we want to have a part in our own future. We control over our own destiny. That’s one of the reasons Islam has made such inroads in this country. It tells you what to do to have eternal life: pray this many times a day at these hours, give this much money, do these good works, make this pilgrimage, and your in. Jesus tells us that our flesh is of no help at all. Only His flesh given for you and me is what can give life. Only our faith in His death and resurrection can grant to us life now and eternal life to come. And because He knows how much we struggle with this, how effective the pressure of the outside world can be for us to go along with their ways and their beliefs He gives us this gift of grace not once but many time over. Every time we hear the Gospel message. Every time you come here to worship and hear it in the words of Absolution, they hymns and readings and sermon. And when you take it inside you through the very special eating of His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. The Father calls out to you and draws you back to the Son through the Holy Spirit. All three members working together to make sure you don’t turn away but abide in Him and He in you. But what about those who have turned away? What about those who without the gift that Jesus has come to give have no life in them? What will happen on the Last Day when they have to “Face the Music”?

I heard a story that tells where that phrase: “Face the Music” came from. There was a man in the medieval days of Japan who wanted the security and prestige that came with being a member of the Imperial Orchestra. There was only one problem he couldn’t play a single note on any of the instruments. But he was able to put pressure on the conductor who, against his better judgment allowed this man in. When the orchestra would begin to play this man raised his flute and went though all the motions of playing, without actually blowing into the flute so that no sound ever escaped the instrument. This deception might have continued indefinitely had it not been for the appointment of a new conductor. The new conductor’s first act was to have each and every member of the orchestra re-audition for their place in the orchestra. This was not a problem for any of the orchestra members save one-the imposter. He tried to get out of this jam he was in by pretending to be sick, pretending there was a family emergency, pretending to forget the audition date. But in the end he was forced to come clean and confess that he wasn’t good enough to be in the orchestra. At which time he was fired. He lost his job, his salary, his home, his wife, and his future. When Jesus returns all those who turned away from Him will have to face the music. All those who wanted a Jesus who fit their beliefs and life style instead of confessing Him as He has revealed Himself will have to face the music. All those who are trusting in themselves or another name or way to be right with God will have to face the music. If you and I had to face the music without the gift of the Bread that came down from Heaven we would be lost as well. But Jesus has given Himself for them just as He gave Himself for us. Strengthened in our faith Jesus sends us out with His Bread, His Gospel Message of love and sacrifice that can turn hearts and minds back to Him. So that they can have the same assurance of eternal life that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen