

## Written Copy: John 6:51-56 “The Living Bread that Abides”

Proper 15: 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### Text: John 6:51-56

<sup>51</sup> 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.” <sup>52</sup> The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” <sup>53</sup> 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. <sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

### The text’s intent

Jesus is the Bread from Heaven-all we truly need for life with God now and unto eternity. He gives us this life through the atoning sacrifice of His body and blood on the cross for the whole world and given to you through the gift of faith that is delivered in the means of grace. You eat of this, make this your own by believing in Him as Lord and Savior through that gift of faith. By eating of this in faith, we make Christ and His salvation work part of ourselves, we join with Him in an intimate faith relationship. Those that refuse the gift of faith cannot believe in Him and what He is offering and so call His sermon a hard saying and turn away. They want to hear what they must do to earn eternal life for themselves. But as Peter proclaims there is no one or no place else to turn to, only Jesus has the words of eternal life.

### Focus Statement:

Jesus uses the Bread of Life as the metaphor to describe who He has come to be and what He has come to do in the lives of all who are called to faith. He comes to feed you real life with Him now that continues all the way to eternal life to come, and provides this for you through the Means of Grace. He comes through the Means of Grace to unite you with Himself making His atoning sacrifice yours and all that it earns yours. He wants to remain connected and united with you renewing and strengthening this relationship you have by faith throughout your earthly lives.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it’s important to know:

We can fail to see our life as Christians as being an intimate faith relationship with our Lord and Savior where He knows us intimately. We can feel that this knowledge of us would make Jesus want to not associate with us because of our sinfulness. We can miss the importance of our continued participation in the Means of Grace as the way to keep this faith relationship alive.

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

Value the gift that is the Means of Grace and willingly and joyfully partake of them, knowing this is Christ at work keeping you in that intimate faith relationship so that you will be united with Him in life everlasting.

### Subject Sentence: The Abiding Faith Relationship Thru Means of Grace

## Introduction

Have you ever gone out to eat at a place you'd never been to before. You look at the menu, and there are so many choices. The waitress comes and you still haven't decided, but everyone else is ready. Of course it's your turn to order first, so you pick something, something safe. Perhaps it's your "go to" dish that you tend to order at other places. But as everyone else is placing their orders you begin to wonder if you made a good choice since theirs all sound more interesting than your "safe bet" order. Then when everyone's dinners arrive your heart drops and you feel disappointed. Their dinners all look so much better than yours. You look at your plate and realize that you could've done better if you stayed home and made it yourself.

In our Gospel Lesson Jesus is presenting this crowd with a remarkable dish, one unlike they could get anywhere else. Yet they refuse to believe it's any good and refuse to believe it's for them. He is offering to them Himself. **John 6:51 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.**" But they are sticking with their safe bet, focusing on what they need to do to live forever. They grumble and say to themselves, "Who is this man, this carpenter's son, to make such bold claims about Himself. How can He tell us to **"eat My flesh"**? And this offends them greatly.

What exactly does it mean to **eat of this bread**? How can we **eat of His flesh and drink of His blood**? And if we do, what is this life that He is offering through this gift?

### **What Does It Mean to Eat of His Bread?**

Why is Jesus using this metaphor of eating bread anyway? It all started with the crowd that was part of the miraculous Feeding of the 5,000 who are seeking Him out because they wanted more of the same, focused only on the temporal ramifications of what He did. They even cite Moses as the provider of a greater miracle, Manna from heaven 6 days a week for 40 years. For this crowd, as well as their ancestors, bread was the main staple of their daily diet. Therefore, Jesus is using bread as a metaphor for them to understand the gift that He, God the Son incarnate, has come to give them, which is all they need for life now and eternal life to come. And He's explaining how exactly they are to receive it.

This crowd knows about eternal life, and they desire to have it. But they are looking at possessing it as the result of something they merit by fulfilling works demanded by God. They believe eternal life is something they need to earn. But Jesus counters that notion by telling them what they truly need to do. **John 6:28-29** <sup>28</sup> **Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"** <sup>29</sup> **Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."**

So what does it mean to eat of Him as the Bread of Life? It means to believe in Him. What does it mean to eat His flesh and drink His blood? As good Lutherans we want to jump right to the Lord's Supper. But that Sacrament has not been given yet. That would mean nothing to any of them at this point. Where did Jesus offer His flesh and His blood, and for what reason? He offered them for the life of the world when He became the atoning sacrifice for all mankind. His body was broken and tortured and His blood was poured out on the cross in your place and mine. He suffered the punishment that is due you and I in our place. He gave His flesh and His blood to forgive all your sins and declare you right with God, so that you will not be condemned by your sins to live apart from Him now and for eternity. Instead, His desire is that you live with Him now and forever.

It's the free gift that cannot be earned by any amount of obedience to the Law. It's the Bread from Heaven that you cannot make or even choose to have. It must be given to you. And it is given to you in the same way that it was being given to the crowd, by the words and testimony of Jesus. It comes via the Gospel Message, His gift to all people.

## **How Do We Have and Hold His Flesh and Drink His Blood?**

How then do we receive it? How do we have and hold it? Through the gift of faith worked by the Holy Spirit in your hearts and minds given by the Means of Grace. What are the Means of Grace? The Gospel Message preached, read and sung, and the Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through these means the Holy Spirit comes to you to create and strengthen His gift of faith. Faith is the power that we do not have within ourselves, nor can we create it. It is the power to have and hold the promises of Christ that we cannot see, taste, touch, or feel. It is the power by which we put our trust, our hope, and our lives in Jesus Christ both as our Savior and our Lord. We entrust our lives to Him as being the one and only person that can forgive our sins and save us from eternal separation from God. We trust and hope in the certainty of His promise that He has done everything necessary to give us life with God now that stretches all the way into eternity.

This is what Jesus was offering to the crowd, yet they refused it. One can only believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior by the work and power of God. At the same time, people can refuse this gift of faith presented to them by the Spirit through Gospel Message. When they do this, they are refusing the only means by which you can make Jesus your Bread of Life and receive all that He has to give you.

## **What Does this Life He is Offering Look Like?**

And what does He have to give you? He comes to give to you an intimate faith relationship with Him. Just as when you eat regular earthly bread it is digested and becomes a part of your body, when you partake of Jesus, the Bread of Life by faith, He comes to be a part of your life, and to make you a part of His. He changes your life by giving to you His life, his perfect sinless life attributed to you. **This means three important things.**

**First of all, you are not alone.** Plenty of times you may feel that way. You are shouldering difficult decisions, you are dealing with the grief laid upon your heart at the loss of a loved one, or some other tragic loss such as a job, or your health. And it can seem like no one else understands the pain and struggle you are going through. But Jesus does. He experienced the sadness of losing someone when His cousin John the Baptist was arrested and executed. And He knows the pressure and crushing burdens that we sometimes experience. After all He took the weight of the world's sins upon His shoulders. And He knows what it is like to deal with these things alone. He watched eleven of His Twelve closest Disciples scatter at His arrest in the Garden, which came about because the 12<sup>th</sup> disciple, Judas, betrayed Him. He felt the crushing loneliness of hanging on the cross and, filled with our sin, even the Father turned His back on His Only Son.

He may not always make His presence felt when you are going through these things. And you are not alone in this. King David once cried out in **Psalms 22:1-2** <sup>1</sup> **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?** <sup>2</sup> **O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.** That's loneliness and misery felt by the one God Himself called "a man after My own heart." But David didn't stay in that despair. He went on to write in **Psalms 22:3-5** <sup>3</sup> **Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.** <sup>4</sup> **In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.** <sup>5</sup> **To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.** David looked back to the Scriptures and what Moses recorded as to how the LORD dealt with His people and voiced this as the hope of faith.

When you are feeling as if you are suffering all alone look back to the promises you have in Christ in the Scriptures. He promises in **Hebrews 13:5** **I will never leave you nor forsake you.** And in **Matthew 28:20b** **And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.** In Scripture the Holy Spirit comes to you and assures you that you do not struggle alone. By the faith given to you in the Means of Grace you can place your trust in all that Jesus promises are true, and that He is with you. The One who proclaims in **Matthew 28:18** **All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me** is the same one who will never leave you or forsake you. And He has the power and authority to see you through even the worst of struggles, pressures, and grief.

**Second of all: you are fully known.** Through His indwelling Spirit that establishes and maintains an intimate faith relationship with you He knows everything about you. This can, at first blush, seem kind of scary. There are certain thoughts, words, and actions that I would rather no one know about, especially the Holy God, and I know you feel the same. Yet this is the God who chose you to be a part of His family when you were still unforgiven in your sins. He points out these sins to you not because He hates you. He hates the sin but loves the sinner. He points them out to you to keep you in a repentant intimate faith relationship with Him. He wants you to see your sin, but then turn and look to Him by faith as your Savior, the one who came to defeat the deathly choke hold sin had over you. He wants you to look to Him with a humbled heart and hear and hold fast by faith to His promise **“Your sins have been completely forgiven.”**

He knows you. He knows your weaknesses and works to protect you from them. He is at work to build up your faith so that when you are tempted you can stand a little straighter and a little stronger next time, not on your own, but with His Spirit present supporting you and lifting you up when you fall.

He knows your health issues and your fears over them. He knows what you will face tomorrow and the next day. He knows, and He is already at work on them so that they serve His purpose and His will for your life. He is even at work mediating the consequences of your sins and mistakes so that they serve to instruct and discipline you without crushing you. And He knows today where you will spend your eternity and is always at work so that you live and die in that intimate faith relationship with Him.

**Thirdly, you are not your own.** You have not just a Savior, but a Lord God whose name is Jesus Christ. **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** <sup>19</sup> **Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,** <sup>20</sup> **for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.** You belong to Him who paid the ransom price to save you from the devil’s grasp and place you into His reign and rule, His family, His Church. And this LORD God is not barking orders at you from the throne on high. He comes to you and speaks into your heart and mind encouraging you through His word to live as a child of the Heavenly Father who glorifies Him in what you think, say and do.

He speaks to us in **Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.** He comes to you in that intimate faith relationship to work in your heart and mind to move and encourage you to be that living sacrifice, to give of your time, your talents, and your treasures serving Him by serving and loving others. He reminds us that all we have is a gift from Him, it's not really our personal possession. He is gracious and loving and gives us more than what we truly need. And from that abundance He directs us to provide for the needs of others. When we do we serve as His witness of the love and forgiveness that Jesus has for all men, the same love and forgiveness He shares with you when you fail to serve as the sacrifice that He calls you to be. He is the LORD God who remains at work in you and provides other opportunities to serve Him by serving others.

## Conclusion

There was once a young boy who was repeatedly late for dinner. His mom and dad would call him, but he wouldn't listen. Instead, he chose to keep on playing, or watching TV until he felt like coming. One day, when he came to the table particularly late, he found everyone sitting in front of a plate full of food except for him. In front of him sat a piece of bread and a glass of water. He stared at his nearly empty plate, feeling crushed, trying unsuccessfully to hold back the tears. It was then he saw his father's hand reach in front of him. His father took that plate and replaced it with his own plate, full of the dinner that the boy loved and wanted.

Jesus has come to you in that intimate faith relationship to be your Bread from Heaven, a full plate of all you need for life now and eternal life to come. You don't earn or deserve this; it is His gift of love. He gives Himself to you in His Word and His Sacraments. You are welcomed into that faith relationship and remain in it through the gift of faith by which you place your trust and your life in Him. He is at work to move you to be a living sacrifice, to share your plate with others, and so share His great sacrificial and unconditional love with those who need to hear and experience it. He remains with you and in you throughout everything that happens in this life. And He works to keep you in that intimate faith relationship so that your confession is the same as Peter's **John 6:68-69 "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, <sup>69</sup> and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."** May you remain steadfast in that confession unto life everlasting. Amen.