

John 6:35-51
"Feed on the Bread of Life"
11th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14B)

August 8, 2021
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Jesus said to them: ***"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst"*** (John 6:35).

To the hearers that day, they must have thought: "This makes no sense at all! This guy must be a fool!"

It is very likely that when the Jews first heard Jesus say, ***"I am the bread of life,"*** they must have just stared at Jesus and envisioned their storehouses filled with food. "Surely this Man is possessed!" they thought, "He claims to have the ability to provide sufficient nourishment – food and drink – to sustain life forever! Come on! Who is He kidding?!"

This is also the reaction by many who claim to be worldly-wise today. When they hear Christ say, ***"I am the bread of life,"*** the worldly-wise would likely say, "You don't say! Aren't you special?!"

This is certainly a strange manner of speech to say to someone to eat of a person who stands before him and says, ***"I am the bread of life."***

Christ's Bread of Life discourse was certainly offensive to many. Christ's speech offended the Jews back then. Christ's speech continues to offend many today.

On this 11th Sunday after Pentecost, Jesus comes to us today and says, ***"I am the bread of life, depend on Me alone, for I give eternal life."***

[Reason]

For the hearers that day, they must have thought Jesus was crazy. This Jesus, the son of Joseph, claiming to be bread come down from heaven. Really?! Well, if we were in that crowd that day, we may have had the same thoughts. This guy has gone off his rocker!

As crazy as Jesus may sound, He is actually teaching them and us to silence the voice of reason and just believe.

Instead of trusting reason, we must look and grab onto nothing, but the Word spoken by Christ. For Christian doctrine certainly sounds ridiculous and nonsensical to reason. To the judgment of reason, Christian doctrine appears so far from the truth that it is impossible to believe it. Reason never comes to grasp with the truth that God is God and I am not. Reason leads us to go astray thinking, *“This doesn’t make any sense to me, so I won’t believe it.”* Thus, the Jews that day found it impossible to accommodate themselves to these words of Christ.

Through reason, the Jews are offended. They murmur and grumble. Using pure reason, they find it impossible for Christ to feed the whole world with His body.

As the Reformation was spreading across Europe, many people thought that they had the right ideas in reforming the Christian Church. For Martin Luther who sparked the Reformation, his reformation was based in getting back to the Scripture alone. The Lutheran Reformation was a conservative reformation as Luther and his allies wanted to get back to the basics of the Christian faith as found in the Scriptures: we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.

But not everyone felt the same way. Other reformers popped up here and there and many had other ideas for where the Reformation should go. One of those men was Ulrich Zwingli. Although Zwingli was formerly a Roman priest – like Luther – he wanted a reformation that was not entirely based in Scripture. He wanted a reformation that used man’s reason. Zwingli certainly appealed to Scripture, but he used his own reason in applying it to the Christian life.

Just as the Jews grumbled at Jesus saying, *“I am the bread of life,”* Zwingli, too, would grumble the same. At a time when these two reformations could have become one, Luther and Zwingli would not budge. Luther held to Scripture. Zwingli held to reason.

To settle this dispute and possibly unite the two reformations, a meeting was attempted with Luther and Zwingli known as the Marburg Colloquy in October of 1529. The two found agreement on every theological point, except for one. They could not find agreement on the Lord's Supper.

The disagreement was over a single word: "is". What is the meaning of "is"? The fight was over these words of Christ: ***"Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you"*** and ***"Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."***

Luther argued that "is" means "is." Zwingli argued that "is" means "represents" or "signifies."

Zwingli said, "For if the 'is' is to be taken literally, then we must eat the body of Christ with its flesh, bones, veins, nerves, marrow and other members which I will forbear to mention."¹ To which Luther would respond saying, "Every time I hope they will produce Scripture, they pronounce their own dreams. [Zwingli] says, if one teaches that the physical or bodily eating of Christ's body forgives sin, that is contrary to faith. I testify on my part that I regard Zwingli as un-Christian, with all his teaching, for he holds and teaches no part of the Christian faith rightly."²

Zwingli was too focused on human reason to the point that he could not believe Christ's very words.

For Luther, the Lord's Supper was a doctrine he would never waver. Since Christ said it, he believed it. That was that. No more thinking. Christ said it, and that was good enough for Luther.

Luther would go on to write in his Large Catechism: We shall learn the [Sacrament of the Altar] and its greatest importance, namely, that the chief thing is God's Word and command. It was not dreamed up or invented by some mere human being but was instituted by Christ without anyone's counsel or deliberation. This Sacrament of the Altar is not a mere memorial meal, it is the true body and blood of the Lord Christ, in and under the bread and wine, which Christians are commanded by Christ's word to eat and drink.

¹ *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 199.

² *Luther's Works, Volume 37: Word and Sacrament III* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1961), 189, 191, 231.

For if the Lord's Supper is only a memorial meal, then there is no benefit to this meal. It is only temporal food that perishes. Not eternal food that endures forever. There is no Means of Grace, thus there is no forgiveness of sins given in eating and drinking. There is no faith being strengthened. If there is no Means of Grace in the Lord's Supper, what's the point? This was Luther's argument!

[Faith]

Again, Jesus says, ***"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst"*** (John 6:35).

If a physician or pharmacist were to tell you: "I can give you a medicine that will save you from death. And with this medicine, you will no longer live in fear of death, since you would be immune from death." Would you take this medicine? This is what Jesus is offering to you and me!

So, what is this medicine and how do I take it? This medicine is in fact – faith. Jesus – the Bread of Life – is the preservative against eternal death. To come to Christ means the same as to believe in Christ. This is what it means to have the Bread of Life and to eat it. For to eat – to come to Christ – and to believe in Christ are all one and the same thing.

Christ says to us, ***"To eat Me means to come to Me and believe in Me."*** We all come to Christ in no other way. We only come to Christ by means of faith in Him. All we have to do is just believe in Him, and then we have eaten Him and come to Him.

So, if you do not want to die and be condemned, come to Christ, believe in Him, cling to Him, and eat Him. When we think this way, this old prayer makes more sense: *"Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."*

We, too, must say to Christ, ***“Give us this bread always”*** (John 6:34) to which He will reply, *“Yes, with all My heart I will give it: for that is why I came from heaven. Believe only Me. Let Me be your food. Do not pin your hope on another food. Beware of that. For I am the bread, not any other man on earth. No one except Me will help you. And if you cling to Me, no devil will do you any harm; for here is the bread which will not let you go hungry.”*

So, are you always clinging to Christ? For many of us, we are being fed moldy bread. We seem to trust false idols more than Jesus. Many of us trust the “so-called experts” on the evening and cable news more than we trust Jesus. Yes, we should be informed, but not to the point that we end up living in fear for ourselves and live in fear of our neighbor.

For many people, unholy fear has become their idol – their false religion. Instead of having your mind molded by the news and culture, open up your Bible, thumb through those pages, and read God’s Word, which is always relevant and newsworthy and God’s Word certainly casts out all fears – *after all what can be more comforting than our salvation through Christ’s body and blood!* And, come to the Divine Service weekly, because this is the place where we always receive the Bread of Life!

The Jewish hearers back then used human reason to the point that they believed they were entitled to not depend upon Jesus as their Bread of Life. They believed that they did not have to believe in Christ for salvation. They believed they were entitled to free lunches and handouts without faith, as they received at the feeding of the 5,000. Today, not much has changed.

Apart from Christ we are indeed helpless. We can’t save ourselves. We need a savior. Thus, Christ took upon Himself our flesh as He came down from heaven to be the Bread of Life that we may eat and never die.

For those who do not hold onto Christ’s flesh and blood by faith, they are lost, they are doomed. So, believe in Christ’s flesh and blood! Christ is the very Bread of Life. So, eat Him, that is, trust in Him. For when we ***“eat of this bread, [we] will live forever”*** (John 6:51).

This bread – *Christ’s flesh* – gave life to the world when He suffered and died for our sins. It is only through His death, that we have life! By faith in Him, we receive the fruits of His death upon the cross: forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation!

Although Christ's words today refer primarily to His coming sacrificial death, within these words we anticipate the blessings of the Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood.

With that being the case, Jesus must have knowingly formed His following words, ***“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst. ... 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 give for the life of the world is my flesh”*** (John 6:35, 51). He said those words in such a way that they would correspond to what He would later say at the Last Supper: ***“This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.”*** And: ***“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood”*** (Luke 22:19-20).

Our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared the foretaste of the feast to come at the Lord's Table to which He invites us to receive the medicine of immortality – *His very Body and Blood under the bread and wine* – as the antidote to eternal death, so we live forever in Jesus Christ!

So, trust in Jesus, depend on Him, for He alone is the Bread of Life who feeds us with His own flesh, so that we will live forever! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠