

Ben Libby

Sermon

August 22nd, Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

To the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One who is, who was, and is to come, to Him be glory forever amen. (Rev 1:8 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from John chapter 6, beginning at verse 47:

47 Amen, Amen, I tell you: The one who believes in me has eternal life. 48 “I am the Bread of Life. 49 Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that anyone may eat it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” 52 At that, the Jews argued among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 So Jesus said to them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. 54 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. 55 For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. 56 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like your fathers ate and died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.”

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

“How hungry are you right now?” We all get hungry all the time. It’s something that we feel not only on a day-to-day basis, but multiple times daily.

I find routinely that every Sunday, after church and Bible class are over, that I am starving! Of course, starving is a bit dramatic. But I rarely eat anything before service, and afterwards I realized that am extremely hungry. When my family and I get home, hunger is about the very first thing we address. I often ask myself at these times, “How hungry are you right now?”, and that question usually determines what I am going to eat to address that hunger.

In our text this morning, Jesus is talking about food. The bread He was talking about wasn’t like the bread His listeners were accustomed of thinking of. This bread wouldn’t just satisfy hunger temporally, rather this bread would result in eternal life. What He says here was an unusual and hard saying. But it was also vitally important.

Do you have any picky eaters at home? We often make decisions about what we eat which are dependent on personal taste. Does this food taste good to me? If I make this meal, will my children eat it? Or sometimes something tastes good to us, but we refrain from eating it because it’s not good for us or isn’t in our current diet plan.

But this is where the bread Jesus is talking about also differs. No one can choose to eat this bread of life. The only way one can eat, and even feast, on the Bread of Life is by God given faith.

Today, we will do that which caused so much consternation in the original hearers of these words; we will eat Jesus’ flesh. It’s not a communion Sunday, but the Lord’s Supper which had yet to be instituted is not only what Jesus is referring to here. We will not be eating loaves of bread, rather something even better. We will be digesting the Word, and the Spirit will give us the blessings that only He can through it. The world eats in a different manner all together. The Word of

God provides us with real food, for the Word give us the Bread of Life, who gives us eternal life. And so, we pray: BLESSED LORD, YOU HAVE CAUSED ALL HOLY SPRICURES 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.

A few Sundays ago, we had the account of Jesus (and by extension of faith Peter) walking on the water. That happened right after Jesus fed a crowd of people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. With these small supplies, Jesus fed over 5,000 men. In the wake of this miracle, the people wanted to take Jesus by force, and make Him their bread king.

Our text this morning is basically what happens next. Jesus withdrew from the crowds after the feeding the day prior, but now they finally catch up to Him. They came with the expectation that Jesus would perhaps feed them once again. He did so, but not in the way they were expecting...

Amen, Amen, I tell you: The one who believes in me has eternal life. 48 "I am the Bread of Life.

Jesus tries to draw the people's attention away from the miracle He had just recently performed and unto whom was able to provide such a miracle in the first place. The first thing He stressed to them when they finally caught up to Him was **"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you (John 6:27 NKJ)** Here he explains further.

How do you explain spiritual things to people who are thinking in worldly terms? This is a fundamental question of mission work. How can we begin to explain the mysteries of faith to people who have weak to no faith? You can come up with all kinds of strategies. But we look to Jesus as our example in all

things. Look what He does here. He takes the miracle and builds off it. And He also plays off the Jewish history that the people were familiar with. **49 Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that anyone may eat it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."**

Throughout this discourse, Jesus mentions the manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness. It was "bread from heaven", that is, it was given to them freely from God. But Jesus is the real bread from heaven that gives life, not just to the Israelites, but to the whole world.

The problem Jesus was encountering here is what John referred to in the first chapter of this Gospel. **He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. (John 1:11 NKJ)** The reason these words were hard to understand for the Jews here is the same reason that they continue to be hard for people today. The world eats differently than Christians do.

We live in a day and age where food is not hard to come by. Sure, there are parts still in this world and our nation where hunger is a problem. But we Americans for the most part don't suffer from a lack of food. Our problem is on the other side of the coin: we eat too much! Our problem is not that we don't eat, rather it's that we eat in abundance, or we eat unhealthily. It's all about what you eat!

The Spiritual menu in our country is extreme. It's like the restaurant, *The Cheesecake Factory*. If you go there, they have this gigantic menu the overwhelms you. Here, in our country, there are so many different churches and denominations that one can choose from. But sadly, at many churches, the Bread of Life isn't on the menu! That is, they water down the Word to the point where it's nothing more than a pleasant story, or a moralizing morsel. Few give you unfiltered Law and Gospel. Instead, they load you up on

promises that if you try, give, and love your best, you will be blest!

We also need to be on guard here as well. Yes, we know who this Bread of Life is. But we need to remember to eat it daily, and to never despise it. That's what the Israelites did in the wilderness. The grumbled, **our soul loathes this worthless bread (Num 21:5 NKJ)** After that, the fiery serpents came! If we ever despise the bread of life, we too will be in danger from the great serpent Satan. Looking to that which was raised up, Jesus Christ on the cross, gives us the antidote against the poison of sin in this world.

52 At that, the Jews argued among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. 54 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. 55 For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink.

What Jesus was saying was hard to understand, that is, without the foundation of faith. They grumbled, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" That same grumble has been said throughout the generations about the Lord's Supper. "How can this really be the body and blood of Jesus?" Again, Jesus is not directly speaking about the Lord's Supper here, but that is exactly what He does in it. We don't worry about the "How can", we just let the Word of promise stand for itself.

Whenever you come across a "How can" in scripture, it's normally a question of unbelief. Think of Zacharias reaction to Gabriel, **"How shall I know this? (Luke 1:18 NKJ)** Or think about another hard saying of Christ's when He told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. **"How can a man be born when he is old? (John 3:4 NKJ)** How did Jesus respond? **"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (John 3:12 NKJ)**

When it comes to the world, "How can" is all that matters. When it comes to faith, "How can" never matters. Jesus is the Word made flesh, and what He says trumps reason. Do not seek to understand so that you may believe, rather believe so that you may understand!

Look at what He says here. **Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves.** This is how we know He is not speaking about the Lord's Supper specifically. The thief on the cross did not eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus, and yet he was saved. What Jesus is getting at, and what the Jews are failing to realize here is this: This eating is a spiritual eating, and it happens through the Spirit by faith alone.

If you only ate once a week, would you survive? Maybe. But why wouldn't you eat every single day if the food was free? Why ever miss a meal? We have free real food in Jesus! Not in the way that those people who wanted to make Jesus King by force thought. He is far greater than a bread King, our King is the bread of life Himself! He is both delicious and nutritious, and He is real food and drink! It should cost us an arm and a leg, but it's free. In fact, you could never buy it! It is only offered freely. **"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. (Isa 55:1-2 NKJ)**

If you had access to free, delicious, and nutritious food, why would you ever go without a meal? That is what we have in the Word! Yes, we get it feed to us every Sunday. But you wouldn't go the whole week without eating, would you? We need to be in the Word every single day, constantly, only then do we get the nourishment our souls require. As Jesus quoted to the tempter, **"It is written, `Man shall not live by bread**

alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." (Mat 4:4 NKJ)

Not only should we be eating, we should be feasting! From verse 54 on in our text, whenever Jesus says the word "eat", He uses a different Greek word than what was previously used. This word has the context how animals consumed food or how a person might eat a crunchy vegetable, to munch, to eat audibly, to crunch. Jesus doesn't just want us to politely nibble at His Word, He wants us to gorge ourselves on it.

Again, it paints a graphic picture that might be found as off putting. That's why after He spoke these things, many left Jesus and remarked, **"This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" (Joh 6:60 NKJ)** He then ask the 12 if they wanted to leave as well. Peter spoke for the group: **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Joh 6:68-69 NKJ)**

Peter got it right here. Indeed, without faith these words are off-putting. After all, this is crazy, right? "You're saying we need to feast on your flesh?" But by faith, this is not crazy. It's crazy comforting! **58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like your fathers ate and died. The one who eats this bread will live forever."**

As the term implies, the Bread of Life gives us life. It does so in two ways. It allows us to live for the One who died for us. Jesus says here, **The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.** Through the Word, we see that we have been redeemed from sin and hell. Not only are we saved, but we have been made alive! Now we can serve our God and neighbor through what Jesus has done for us on the cross. Jesus says, "Just as the living God sent me, and I live because of Him, so too shall you live in me." And really, it's the only way to live. In the truest sense of the word, you cannot live life with faith in Jesus. Sure, you can be alive and go about your

day-to-day existence without faith in Jesus. But that is just a zombie life, they are the walking dead. We, on the other hand, are truly alive because we know that Jesus has saved us.

The other way the Bread of life gives life is eternal. **The one who believes in me has eternal life.** The resurrection, another subject which "How can" cannot get over, is threaded throughout these words. **50 so that anyone may eat it and not die. 51 If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. 54 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. 58 The one who eats this bread will live forever."** The resurrection and subsequent eternal life is the main topic discussed here.

Again, this is where the Bread of Life is different, superior. No matter how much food you have, or what kind of food you eat can extend your time of grace. Perhaps eating the wrong kind of food can shorten it. If I ate Taco Bell every day, how long would I last for? Healthy foods are all the rage nowadays. People think that eating healthy will extend their lives and enhance their way of life. It might. But no matter what you eat, you are going to die.

Think of the curse that was pronounced on us when we fell into sin. **In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."** (Gen 3:19 NKJ) It was eating that doomed us in the first place. When man ate the forbidden fruit, we were doomed to die eternally. Now, it is by eating spiritually that we will live forever more!

How can we be so sure? Once again, the unbelief of "how can" creeps in, doesn't it? Well, we can always answer that with a simple GOD SAYS SO. But we also have been given proof of our future eternal life. It is the Bread of Life Himself who is your living proof! Jesus died to pay for your sins, **AND HE WAS RAISED FOR YOUR JUSTIFICATION!!!** Because Jesus rose from the dead, He proved once and for all that this wasn't crazy, this was comforting! The Bread

of Life is not dead, He could not be spoiled. He lives and reigns forever! And so too shall you!

So, how hungry are you right now? Your stomach might be growling, but hopefully your soul has been satisfied. Do you never need to eat spiritually again? Theoretically not. The Bread of life is perfect and satisfying in every way. The problem is that we still have this sinful flesh. That is why we need to continue to eat every single day. We need constant reminders that we are sinful, lest we become complacent. We need constant reminders that our sins have been paid for by the Bread of Life, and that ultimately means that even though we will die, we shall live. And we need constant reminders that since we have been made alive, we should live for Him and serve in His kingdom.

Yes, our spiritual hunger is great, and it is constant. Our faith needs nourishment. So, eat! Feast on the Flesh of Jesus! It is the only real food out there, the only one that can give you what you really need. It is by the bread of Life, Jesus, that you have eternal life. He does what He promises. **51 If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.** All praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, and your living Savior who gives you eternal life! AMEN!!!