

“No Ordinary Flesh and Blood”

John 6:51-69

In last week’s Gospel lesson, also taken from John chapter 6, we heard Christ explaining to the people in no uncertain terms that it is only through faith in the Man standing before them, faith in the flesh and blood of the person of Jesus Christ, that salvation is possible.

And the Jews, many of whom were even followers of Jesus, said, “How can this be?” “What do you mean by this?” “How can this fellow from Nazareth say that He is greater than Moses who gave us the Law.” “Jesus is too arrogant. He is carrying things to extremes.” “Jesus, we don’t understand what you are saying. Just tell us what good things we need to do in order to save ourselves.”

“This is a hard teaching...who can accept it.” And as John records, “from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.”

We expect the crowd to grumble against the Lord. The crowd has always grumbled against the Lord. But it is very distressing to see those who were close to Christ, who were called His disciples, who may have even been among the 72 who Jesus sent to preach in His name throughout the towns and countryside of all of Israel; it is very distressing to see these people fall away and reject the flesh and blood of Christ – reject the Bread of Life.

This is very distressing, but from this we also get a strange bit of comfort. Nowhere in the history of the world has the Good News of salvation been preached more purely or properly than from the mouth of Jesus Christ. Yet, even those who should have been the most loyal supporters of the Gospel become unfaithful, turn away from Christ's teaching, and no longer follow Him.

Oddly, from this we can derive a little bit of comfort knowing that we need not blame ourselves when our less than perfect preaching and teaching is also not received very well, even by those who are close to us. As with Christ, it is very distressing when our efforts to share the Good News of salvation seem to fall on deaf ears, but we need to remember that not every seed that is sown brings forth a bountiful harvest and some seeds lie dormant for years before God causes them to sprout forth with life.

Like many of the people listening to Jesus, the majority of our society is offended by the message that there is nothing good inside any person apart from God. And they are doubly offended with the message that there is no salvation apart from eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ.

But as we saw last week, Christ sets His flesh apart from all other flesh. His flesh is holy, blessed, and endowed with the Holy Spirit (LW 23:167). As Jesus says, our flesh "counts for nothing," and it cannot understand His words. Luther says: "Therefore it is for us to close our eyes and our mouth, to open our ears, and to hearken solely to Christ's lips and words: 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.'"

In these words we must have faith. But what is this eating and drinking that we have put our faith in? Last week, we saw that with these

words, Christ was not specifically talking about the eating and drinking in the Sacrament on this occasion, because He has not yet instituted it. That will have to wait until the Upper Room. This is something different – although it certainly does allude to it and foreshadow it and prepares His disciples for it.

The eating and drinking that Jesus mentions in John chapter 6 is the receiving of faith in the flesh and blood of Christ as the only means of salvation. Our relationship with Christ, brought through the Holy Spirit's calling and preserving us in faith, goes far beyond any relationship we have with one another.

Our friends and loved ones can be near us, rub elbows in the pew, hang around one another, offer a hug, a high five, or a shoulder to cry on, but our union with Christ brings Him into us. While in the Upper Room with His disciples, on the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus said: "Because I live, you also will live...I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" [Jn. 14:19-20].

Our faith in that flesh that was nailed to the cross and that blood that was spilled on the ground, as being the only source of salvation, feeds us with the only food that can truly satisfy our hunger, give us life, and strengthen these frail bodies. When, in faith, we partake of that Bread of Life, like any nutritious food, those life-giving nutrients permeate every cell of our body and become a part of us.

Christ's flesh and blood are the building blocks of the only real life that can be experienced in this dark, dead world of sin. Apart from our faith in that Man nailed to the cross, we are but "the flesh [which] counts for nothing."

In Christ we have value. In Christ we have forgiveness, peace, hope, and the only life worth having. Through His Word and Sacraments, He has

permeated every fiber of our being and claimed us as His own. We no longer belong to Satan; we no longer even belong to ourselves. We are Christ's possession. There is no need to seek or strive for another source of salvation.

We join Simon Peter and say: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Amen.