

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 12
Saturday, August 10, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, August 11, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

“The Bread That I Will Give for the Life of the World is My Flesh”

John 6:35-51

For several weeks, “bread” has been a common theme in our Gospel readings. Not just the past two weeks where I was out of town, but even three weeks ago, when we heard of the feeding of the 5000, we have been talking about Jesus being the true Bread of Life. The presence of Christ our Lord in our lives satisfies our real hunger. The Israelites who ate manna in the wilderness, and the 5000 men plus the women and children which Jesus fed with the five loaves and two fish eventually all died. Jesus says, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

And the crowd grumbles about what Jesus is saying. “How can He say that He is the bread which came down from heaven?” Jesus irks the Jews with this concept and irks them even further, if you read on in John’s Gospel, as He declares in no uncertain terms that the physical flesh and blood that stands before them is the only source of salvation. And the people grumble.

This man standing before them is no ordinary man. They may know who his mother is, and they may think they know who His father is, but His flesh and blood is no ordinary flesh and blood. His flesh and blood has been joined in union with the eternal Son of God who came down from heaven.

God is found in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. In sending Christ into the world to suffer and die on the cross for the sake of His people, Martin Luther says, “[in doing this, God says to the world,] ‘If you believe my Son, receive Him, and taste of His flesh and blood, then you most assuredly have encountered Me. You will neither have nor find Me in any other way’” (LW 23:120).

Luther also wrote in the Smalcald Articles (one of the last things he wrote before he died), “[We] must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil.”

What Luther is saying is that the devil is going to come at you with something that is meant to distract you from where God wants you to be. And like with Jesus, he is going to use things that are appealing to you or he is going to tap into your other hungers in life. He has had lots of practice and he knows all of your weak spots. He certainly knows mine.

And when we rely on something other than the sure foundation of the Word of God – whether it is spoken or joined to the visible element of a sacrament – if we look elsewhere for a source of strength, or comfort, or joy all that we will find is what Satan wants us to find.

God does not want to deal with us except through His Means of Grace. I know this seems like foolishness to the world, but, in His wisdom, He has chosen to come to us in this way. As a result, all other ways of worshiping God or attempting to approach God will never bring a person in contact with the Creator. All will fail to find Him unless they partake of the Bread of Life.

Our spiritual food is much like our physical food. Driving by a grocery

store, or restaurant, or farm and saying, “Isn’t it wonderful that we have ample food in our community,” yet doing nothing to get any of that ample food will cause your ultimate demise. Driving by a restaurant or grocery store does not sustain you. You need to eat.

Driving by the church and saying, “Isn’t it wonderful we have such a nice church in our community,” yet doing nothing to receive what is offered here will lead to your ultimate demise. You need to eat the Bread of Life which has come down from heaven.

It is only in Christ’s flesh that was nailed to the cross and His blood which was spilled on the ground that we are saved. The Person of Jesus Christ cannot be left out of the salvation promise. No other flesh, no other sacrifice is going to cover your sins and appease the wrath of God. Anyone who tries to get into heaven through any other means than faith in Christ alone worships the Creator in vain.

It is much like what occurred in the Old Testament, when God wanted to be found nowhere but in the Tabernacle made in the days of Moses and later the temple at Jerusalem. This was God’s order, but in rebellion, the Jews set up altars at Bethel, Gilgal, and many other places throughout the land (and not all of them were altars only to the One True God).

The Jews argued that if God is the Creator of heaven and earth and is present everywhere, then He is also on every mountain and in every valley. To justify their actions, they reasoned that the Almighty God should not be imprisoned by the walls of the temple. Since He is on every hill and in every valley, therefore it is proper for me to serve Him wherever and however I want (LW 23:121).

But their apparent outward zeal for the Lord was not pleasing in God's sight. The Lord had warned them in Deuteronomy chapter 12: He said very specifically: "Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please."

The reality is that the Bread of Life, the flesh of Christ, this is how God has chosen to feed His people. Jesus says, "I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." "I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

We can be like the crowd in Jesus's day and argue with Him and grumble about how He has chosen to present Himself. Telling God that He is not doing things the right way has never really worked out for anyone – ever.

In His wisdom, it is only in the flesh and blood of Christ, in the Bread of Life that has come down from heaven and is presented here to you, that a closeness with God may be achieved. You will not find the Bread of Life on even the most beautiful mountain or the most fertile valley.

Because a closeness with God is not something that we achieve by our doing. God is the one who finds us; God is the one who calls us to faith; God is the one who feeds us with the Bread of Life; God is the one who grants us forgiveness for our sins and has opened the gates of heaven so that we may enter in. All of this is only done through that flesh that was nailed to the cross, and that blood that was spilled on the ground in which we now participate.

In this we see the depth of Christ's love. Jesus says, "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." Amen.