

Sunday Lesson – August 15, 2021

GOSPEL: John 6: 51-58

“I am the Bread - the Living Bread!”

Context

“Once again we are faced with a Gospel text that deals with bread and eating. But once again, this is not simply a repetition of the last two Sunday texts. John is still exploring the truth revealed when Jesus fed the multitude (6:1-15), and is drawing us deeper into the meaning of that revelation.

The lectionary begins by picking up verse 51 from last Sunday’s text, because Jesus’ statement there about his flesh causes arguments to break out within the crowd and provides the opportunity for Jesus to move this conversation to the next level. The crowd begins to express their confusion over how Jesus can give his flesh for them to eat.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-20-2/commentary-on-john-651-58-2)*

Insight

“Jesus’ graphic imagery about eating His flesh and drinking His blood is indeed puzzling at first. As we consider *everything* that Jesus said and did in John 6, the meaning of His words becomes clearer. Earlier, Jesus fed the 5,000 (John 6:1–13). The next day, the same multitudes continued to follow Him, seeking another meal. Jesus pointed out their short-sightedness: they were only seeking physical bread, but there was something more important: “Food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (verse 27). At this point, Jesus attempts to turn their perspective away from physical sustenance to their true need, which was spiritual.

This contrast between *physical* food and *spiritual* food sets the stage for Jesus’ statement that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Jesus explains that it is not physical bread that the



world needs, but spiritual bread. Jesus three times identifies Himself as that spiritual bread (John 6:35, 48, 51). And twice He emphasizes faith (a spiritual action) as the key to salvation: “My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life” (verse 40); and “Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life” (verse 47).

Having established His metaphor (and the fact that He is speaking of *faith* in Him), Jesus presses the symbolism even further: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh. . . . I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Anyone who feeds on me will live because of me” (John 6:51-56,NLT).

To prevent being misconstrued, Jesus specifies that He has been speaking metaphorically: “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life” (John 6:63). Those who misunderstood Jesus and were offended by His talk about eating His flesh and drinking His blood were stuck in a physical mindset, ignoring the things of the Spirit. They were concerned with getting another physical meal, so Jesus uses the realm of the physical to teach a vital spiritual truth. Those who couldn’t make the jump from the physical to the spiritual turned their backs on Jesus and walked away (verse 66).” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/Jesus-eat-flesh-drink-blood.html)*

Gospel Reading

“I’m telling you the most solemn and sober truth now: Whoever believes in me has real life, eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. Your ancestors ate the manna bread in the desert and died. But now here is Bread that truly comes down out of heaven. Anyone

eating this Bread will not die, ever. I am the Bread—living Bread!—who came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this Bread will live—and forever! The Bread that I present to the world so that it can eat and live is myself, this flesh-and-blood self.” At this, the Jews started fighting among themselves: “How can this man serve up his flesh for a meal?” But Jesus didn’t give an inch. “Only insofar as you eat and drink flesh and blood, the flesh and blood of the Son of Man, do you have life within you. The one who brings a hearty appetite to this eating and drinking has eternal life and will be fit and ready for the Final Day. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. By eating my flesh and drinking my blood you enter into me and I into you. In the same way that the fully alive Father sent me here and I live because of him, so the one who makes a meal of me lives because of me. This is the Bread from heaven. Your ancestors ate bread and later died. Whoever eats this Bread will live always.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

“In John 6, multiple verbs convey the act of eating. Jesus uses *trogein* in verses 54, 56, 57, and 58b. First, in the leadership quarrel in verse 52 they use the perhaps less earthy version of to eat, *phagein*. Jesus’ verb choice is arguably more offensive, leaving his metaphorical flesh stuck in their teeth—or a recollection of John’s prologue introducing the incarnation: The Word became flesh because God so loves the world.

Second, the narrator carefully composed each of the elements of this chapter, knitting them together into a cohesive whole. Raymond E. Brown uses “to feed” for *trogein* because it emphasizes the realism of the Johannine account of the eucharistic meal. It also functions as both verb and noun: daily feed for the sheep and animals feeding. Jesus’ flesh and blood is the believer’s daily bread, the believer’s daily feed. It seems to offer semantic range for the way, by feeding, the believer

“remains” or “abides” in Jesus and Jesus in the believer (verse 56).

The Fourth Gospel is sometimes called the Gospel of Life. For good reason, according to Brown: “life” occurs 36 times in the Gospel of John and 16 times in the Synoptics. “Life” and “live” occur 17 times in the NRSV of the Bread Discourse. For John, eternal life is not something that God gives to us in the “next” life. Rather, it is something we experience in this life, though it is not determined by the natural life. Brown distinguishes the “natural life” which God gives when God breathes the Spirit into the human being and the Spirit that Jesus breathes onto the disciples in the locked upper room. The narrator views the coming of eternal life through the incarnation, namely the real life of Jesus. In that sense, those who trust in Jesus have already passed from death (separation from God through sin) into life with God now.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by Robert Hoch*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Hebrews 8:5](#) *Some tangible things are a “copy and shadow of what is in heaven”*
- [Jeremiah 31:33/1 Corinthians 3:16](#) *God’s laws written on our hearts/The physical tent of meeting has been replaced by a spiritual temple of God*

Thought for the Day

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” ~ *Hebrews 12:2*

A Prayer

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.** (*Book of Common Prayer*)