

John 6:41-51

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

August 15, 2021

As we continue to delve into this bread of life chapter, we think of food. There's lots of interest in food. Cooking shows on TV are popular. Restaurant reviews appear in newspapers and shows visit places that serve good food across the country. Churches have found that food is good for bonding and include it with many meetings and events, at least pre-pandemic. Most people enjoy eating; in fact, we consume too much. Health officials warn about the level of obesity in our land. Diet plans are as popular as food shows. As we ate out on our recent trip, I noted some of the postings of the calories on the menu items almost hid the prices of the entrees.

When it comes to the Bread of life, however, we don't need to worry about restrictions. In fact, we can encourage

DON'T HOLD BACK

I. Feast on the Bread of Life

II. Enjoy its benefits

We don't need to hold back but can feast on the Bread of Life that was offered in his teaching. The quote our Savior cited was from the book of Isaiah. "It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.'" That's in chapter 54. The previous chapter is familiar. It tells of the work of the Messiah. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Those verses originally were shared to prepare the Old Testament people for the Savior God had promised. They serve us to show God's faithfulness in keeping his promises. Jesus took our place in suffering for sin. But he did not just suffer. He won the victory. The chapter further assures, "He will see the light of life...my righteous servant shall justify many." Isaiah brought hope and joy to God's people. That is how they were taught by God.

He used the messages of law and gospel, the law to identify and condemn the sins which were prevalent in the lives of all, and the gospel to tell of the solution he would provide in the Savior. That is how he teaches us still.

God's Son was the key ingredient in his recipe for the Bread of Life. Two weeks ago you heard of the miracle by which Jesus provided earthly food for a crowd of five thousand. Last week we heard part of Jesus' response to the people's desire to make him their bread king. Better was to receive him as the Bread of Life from heaven. He encouraged us to savor this best bread. Instead the crowd objected. "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" They were much like the people from his hometown of Nazareth. They were too familiar with him. They thought they knew his background (of course, they had only partial knowledge). They didn't see Jesus as anybody special, so viewed it as wrong for him to make the claim that he did. The miracle the day before had not convinced them. They grumbled against him.

Let's look at what God taught. Jesus is both God and man. He is God from eternity who became man in time, marvelously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. That makeup is more than meets the eye or fits in our brain, but it is exactly what the world needed. As both God and man he was perfectly suited for his work of saving us. He was above the law as its giver but placed himself under it and kept it flawlessly as the substitute for all of us. He could not die as God but as man he could and did die on the cross. As God that sacrifice paid the price for the entire human race. He rose in triumph and still lives as the God-man.

We can't rely on our reason to explain such good news. Simply marvel at it and rejoice. Recognize that God is greater than we are. If we could dissect and explain everything about him, wouldn't we be the higher ones? Admit that God knows more than you do and accept that what he tells you is true.

We are drawn by God to believe him. Jesus did not argue with the objectors. He simply proclaimed the truth for them to listen to and learn. That is how he draws people to himself. The Holy Spirit is working through the Word. He leads sinners and doubters to repentance and faith. He convinces and converts. Jesus' teaching brings more than knowledge. It plants faith in human hearts. Since he works through the message we want to feast on the Bread of Life so that it happens in our hearts. That's why we don't hold back. Satan tries to plant doubts about the Word. Is it really true? How can you believe that? Feast on the Bread of Life and you will be sure.

Jesus' audience was not worse than us. Our reason can get in the way of trust in him. That's why the miracle alone did not convince the people but needed also the message he brought. Natural man cannot understand God and divine truths. He rejects the Lord and regards his teachings as foolish. But as the Apostle Paul declared to the Romans, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation." It conquers and overcomes our natural resistance. It happens not by force but by winning our trust. When the Lord seizes a heart he captures the mind also. Christians are not naïve, simple people, although Jesus did say we need to become like little children with their confident trust. There are brilliant minds that believe God's Word. Jesus did not address the question of why some believe and others do not. Our minds will not solve that mystery and attempts to do so lead to false doctrine. Say no more than the Bible does. Faith is not our work but a gift of God's grace. His recipe is simple: hear and believe his Word. Feast on the Bread of Life, on Jesus your Savior.

II.

When we really like a favorite food we may eat too much and overindulge. Then we regret it. Our stomach may hurt, we get sluggish or the scales will scold. We vow not to do it again. It's not that way with the Bread of Life. Don't hold back but enjoy its benefits. It is better than manna. The crowd had earlier brought up the matter of manna. We heard some of the background last week. Manna was the food God provided for his people during their journey through the desert to the Promised Land. The large nation of Israel would not survive on the available resources in a desert. They had run out of the supplies brought from Egypt. So they grumbled. God supplied what they needed. In the morning the ground was covered with thin, white flakes. The Israelites looked at it and asked, "What is it?" That question ("mannah" in Hebrew) became the food's name. Manna tasted like wafers made with honey. It was versatile. They could bake it or boil it. Daily there was available an amount of about two liters per person by our measure. If they were greedy and took more, it spoiled, except on Friday when they gathered a double amount, for none came on Saturday, which God later established as the Sabbath day of rest for the nation. The supply of manna continued throughout the forty years Israel spent in the desert, stopping only when they were established in Canaan and receiving its produce. It kept them alive, a real blessing from God. Thus it was an affront to him when they complained, but he patiently and faithfully kept giving it to them.

As we noted last week, such food satisfies for today. The next day we become hungry again, if not sooner. Earthly food does not last (except for those pounds that like to accumulate around our waist). There was something else about it that Jesus noted. Those people who ate of the manna died. Every one of them. Food

does not prevent death. We may be living longer these days but all will succumb to death.

The benefit of taking in the Bread of Life lasts eternally. "Here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die." That's better food. What can bring such results? "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." He died for our sins. He paid for them all. Jesus lived for us also, achieving holiness. With sins gone and holiness filling our record, we are welcome in heaven eternally. That is true soul food. Eating it is believing in Jesus as Savior. The death that we as believers escape is eternal death. Physically we still die at the end of our days. The earthly shell in which we live stops functioning but the soul lives on. It passes from this world to the next. For believers that is to heaven. The moment after our last breath we are with the Lord. The soul will rejoin the body on the Last Day. We will be resurrected with a glorified body like Jesus had on Easter.

What a life awaits us! When I ask catechism students about life in heaven the simple answer often comes that it will be perfect. I'd like a bit more detail. What we will enjoy is beyond our present experience but we know some things about it. We will be surrounded by beauty, with more gorgeous scenery than we have viewed no matter where we have traveled. We will dwell in security. People purchase security systems for their businesses and homes but they can fail or clever criminals can outsmart them, so they still suffer loss. What about heaven? No enemies will be present to threaten us nor will the devil be able to tempt us. Sin and woes will be gone. So maybe "perfect" is not such a bad answer.

Eating the Bread of Life (that is, believing in Jesus) flavors life now. One way is personal for me, because of the last time I preached on this text. It was six years ago. We had been on a brief vacation and we were going to spend the final few days in my Dad's house, doing a few tasks and visiting him in the nursing home where he had resided for a couple months. He died a few hours after we arrived. I had mostly prepared the sermon before we left on vacation. The truths Jesus proclaimed reminded me what I needed to hear. The promise, "He will live forever," brought comfort. How true it is that God gives what we need at the right time. It was a time for joy, not for being sad at our loss.

Death and eternity are not the only things affected by eating the Bread of Life. It changes our purpose for living on this earth. Spiritual matters become important for us. Our priority is not life's busy schedule. We are moved to serve our Savior. We enjoy doing so. Thus I point to the open position on our church council. There

are the monthly calls for cleaning help as well as other care for the church grounds and preparations for services by the altar guild. Sunday School will be resuming soon with opportunities to teach and help. There is the role of parents and grandparents in leading the family to Jesus. There are opportunities to witness at work, at school and among friends. There is the testimony of upright behavior.

The Bread of Life gives us a confident outlook. We know where we are going. We know our loving Lord is watching over us, guarding us in body and soul, guiding us on our daily path. Earthly conditions can't rob us of his care nor of our eternity. We live joyfully.

May the words of Jesus encourage us not to hold back. Feast on the Bread of Life. Enjoy its benefits. Be strengthened in your faith. "I tell you the truth," Jesus declared. Some may recall it as "Verily, verily I say unto you." Literally it is, "Amen, amen." It draws emphasis to his words, pointing out that what he says is absolutely sure. We do not bank our trust on something that is false or uncertain. These are the words of our Savior. Cling to him and his Word. Enjoy life now and forever in heaven.