

John 6:51-58  
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 22, 2021

There is an African proverb that states, "It takes a village to raise a child." I'm not getting political: I realize a prominent female politician published a book using the first part of the proverb as its title 25 years ago. Rather I cite it to note that parents appreciate the fact that a concerned and supportive community helps provide education for their children in public schools through taxes or in church schools through offerings. They are glad that neighbors keep their eye out for the safety and welfare of their children and watch out for risky behavior (even if that's not always welcomed by the youngsters).

In the spiritual realm even a village can't do all that is needed, however. All human efforts are destined to fail, for they are flawed by sin. There is one who can and who not just helps, but

#### HE DOES IT ALL

- I. Jesus gave his life for us v51
- II. Jesus offers us to eat and drink by faith v52-55
- III. Jesus maintains faith and life v56-58

Jesus does it all, most of all, he gave his life for us. After several weeks of considering portions of John 6 you may be thinking, "Enough already!" You're tired of the repetition. Today's text even begins with the final verse of last Sunday's Gospel reading. In response I could make a comparison with the Israelites and their grumbling about the sameness of the manna day after day, but I won't. It is true that the spiral or circular pattern of John's Gospel is likely not as familiar of a writing style to us. But please indulge me. I wanted to preach through the entire series once, something I was unable to do when serving on a multi-pastor team.

What our Lord Jesus says here again is important. Repetition aids learning. Who doesn't forget a lot of what we're exposed to in our information-saturated world? Repetition may be needed to remind a child to pick up their toys, for a student to be ready for an exam or to recall instruction received in the past. I remember as a high school student asking my father (who was thirty years older than I was) a question about chemistry class since I knew he had taken the course. Although at the time I was amazed that he didn't remember the issue, I discovered it took a lot less than thirty years to draw a blank on information from high school classes that weren't an active part of my adult life. Every day as we age we seem to struggle a bit more with memory. Some of our problems result from not paying attention. Other times our

presuppositions interfere with what a person really said. The point is, we usually need to receive a message more than once.

Furthermore, what Jesus taught was in many ways contrary to our reason. It is natural to think we are responsible for solving our problems. The only thing is, that doesn't work with our problem of sinfulness. Yes, we caused it by disobeying God's law which calls for perfection in avoiding wrong and in doing good. We violate his will in our thoughts and words as well as our actions. We are steeped in sin and can't do anything to make up for it. God repeats the law's condemnation to hammer home the message that we can't escape our guilt by personal efforts.

We can't, but Jesus does it all as the Living Bread. "I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." He explains what this bread is: not bread for our bodies as he had miraculously supplied for the crowd the previous day, but the fact that he would die for the sins of the world. It was a major undertaking since as the eternal Son of God, he was immortal; he couldn't die. That's why he took on human flesh and entered our existence in a marvelous way.

He was always serving the goal of rescuing us from sin as he lived for us and spent valuable time teaching about the kingdom of God. His work reached its climax on the cross. He shouldered the sins the world had piled up and those yet to come, including those of the twenty-first century, each deserving torment in hell, and endured the full fury of the Father's anger. That is why he was forsaken by his Father during those hours of darkness. Note he *gave* his life. People were involved: Judas betrayed him, the religious leaders had plotted it and clamored for it, Pilate agreed to the execution, but his death was a sacrifice that he offered of his own volition.

He did it for us. We didn't come around until centuries later but the term "the world" includes all people, not just the ones living then. The devil raises doubts when our guilt looms large in our conscience. "Can God really love me? Would he do that for me?" "World" makes it definitely clear. That's everyone of every age, past, present and future. He does it all, for all.

## II.

What he accomplished he brings to us. Jesus offers us to eat and drink by faith. His words caused consternation. "Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" The disagreement was not between two sides, one for Jesus and the other against him. It regarded for which reason to reject him. Their problem was they were thinking in earthly terms about physical gnawing on Jesus' flesh. The thought seemed gross, and it would be.

Jesus was talking about believing in him. Trust what he did. He removed our sins by his death and supplied us righteousness by his life. He rescued us from the hell we deserved. He gives us heaven. He did it all. The work is completed. The benefits are yours.

He is the complete way and the only way. All other attempts fail. No other gods actually exist so they can't deliver. They are only delusions of someone's mind. Anything involving our efforts flops because we cannot meet the standards. That's why the Savior stated, "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." There is nothing fake or sham about him. He delivers. He does it all.

That is great news. We take it in eagerly. The third time in this text that Jesus spoke of eating his flesh he changed to a term that is often used with animal activity. It reminded me of my youth on the farm. When I brought in a pail or a basket of feed the pigs or cattle swarmed around me, almost knocking me off my feet. They devoured the grain as soon as I dumped it in the trough or feed bunk. That depicts the eagerness with which we consume Jesus by faith. We enter an intimate relationship with him. He lives in our hearts.

There is a saying, "You are what you eat." The food we take in becomes the building materials for our bodies. It is also true here. We become like Jesus and take on his ways.

When hearing of eating his flesh and drinking his blood we may at first think of the Lord's Supper. That sacrament is part of the nourishment he provides for our souls and we welcome it today, but it had not yet been instituted at the time of this text and wouldn't be for another year. Receiving it is not a requirement for entrance into heaven. There will be many people in heaven who never partook of it. All the believers from the Old Testament—think of Moses, prophets like Elijah and Isaiah or King David. There are the children who died in faith but hadn't reached the time of confirmation. Some people who do commune will not be saved. If we come unworthily, that is, not believing or not repentant for our sins or if we fall away from faith, we won't be in heaven. Requiring the Lord's Supper to get to heaven would make us dependent on our act, not on God's grace. Rather, receiving communion is part of the strengthening that is God's will and it brings results.

### III.

Jesus maintains faith and life, unlike manna. He came back to that topic because they had brought it up, implying that is was better than what he offered. Manna fed the body, which continued life for a time. All of those who ate manna died. Only two of the adults who left Egypt entered the Promised Land (Joshua and Caleb, the pair of

faithful spies who had scoped out the land and assured the Israelites God would give it to them). Earthly benefits are not enough.

Like they looked to the past, many Christians today have ancestral connections with Jesus. Some of you have forefathers whose names appear here on the stained glass windows or in the historical records of the congregation. They left a great example. We are thankful for it. But don't rely on it. We each need a personal, continued bond of faith in our Savior. Note the present tense in the promise, "He who *feeds* on this bread will live forever." Earlier Jesus spoke of the one who "remains in me."

That feeding and remaining comes by use of the means of grace. It involves the same tool that brought us to faith: the gospel, the good news of Jesus. Remember your baptism and its blessings. Use it to drown the old Adam. It pops up like the figures in the Whack-a-Mole game. We drown it by daily contrition and repentance. Know that God's Spirit dwells in you, that God has placed his name on you. Drink in the Word, reading and studying it, pondering its truths. Partake of Holy Communion with its personal assurance of forgiveness.

Added opportunities for spiritual growth are resuming next month. There will be Sunday School for our children and Bible class for adults on Sundays and Wednesdays. Online resources are available such as daily devotions from wels.net and printed materials from our Northwestern Publishing House, including *Meditations* and *Forward in Christ* that are available in the narthex. Use these resources for strength so that you remain in faith and grow in Christian living to thank your Savior.

The result is eternal life. Explorers once sought the Fountain of Youth that they thought would enable them to live forever. We may scoff at such an idea today, but we mimic the effort as we try to mask or postpone the aging process. When you think about it, many would not desire to return to the struggles of their teen years or the hard times of past decades. Who would want to continue in our present sinful condition?

Better is the life awaiting us in heaven. Remember some of the descriptions of it: no more crying or mourning or pain. Good riddance to all of that! We welcome the new life of freedom and joy in the presence of God and our fellow believers, God's gift as he maintains faith and life.

Promotions tell us to eat local. Then you know your food source. Here we encourage you to eat of Jesus. Feed on his Word and sacraments with the message he gave his life for you. Believe that Jesus does it all and enjoy life eternal.