

## **TAKING A GREAT BIG BITE OUT OF JESUS**

***(John 6:51-58)***

We have a very graphic passage of scripture before us from John's gospel this morning, so there's no need in us shying away from it. We might as well just pull out our knives and our forks and start digging in! Because JESUS is inviting us to breakfast this morning; and the very peculiar thing about it is that the only item on the menu is JESUS HIMSELF! (I know those of you in the Breakfast Club may already be full this morning from some of Ellie's pancakes, but you might want to make a little room for what Jesus is whipping up for us in today's gospel lesson).

Because Jesus says point-blank to us this morning, that *unless you eat his flesh and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*

I'm not afraid to say this morning that there is a part of me that just wants to give a great big "YUCK" to that!

But let's re-wind our scripture story back a bit, and get a running start up to where we find ourselves this morning.

## II.

This whole conversation got started earlier in John 6, after Jesus had fed upwards of 5,000 people with 5 pieces of barley bread and two smoked fish, and ended up with 12 baskets of scraps left over! Sounds like quite the picnic—brought to you by the God of abundance!

Oh yes! Because we serve a God *who is able* to provide what it is that we need. Can I get a witness? I know *somebody* is here today to give God the praise for providing for you in a way that you needed in your life—just when you needed that provision! God was ON time for you, and God was IN time for you! We don't serve a God of scarcity; we serve a God of abundance! We serve a God who is ABLE!

The next day, after that picnic they had, some of those who had eaten and had their fill stayed around, in hopes of perhaps getting some MORE food from Jesus. Their attitude seemed to be that since Moses

gave their ancestors manna from heaven *every day* during their 40-year journey in the wilderness, that Jesus should be able to give them more than one day's worth of food!

Jesus reminded them that it wasn't *Moses* that gave the Israelites the manna in the wilderness—it was *God* who gave their ancestors their daily manna, and let me remind you this morning that it is God who **STILL** gives us our daily bread.

But both daily manna and daily bread are perishable. If you don't eat it up soon, it will go bad on you. In fact, in Exodus 16, one of the chapters where the scriptures talk about God giving the manna to the Israelites in the wilderness, all the manna that is left over from the previous day is spoiled by the next morning—in part so that God could give them a **NEW** blessing of daily manna *every day*, so the Israelites could learn that God is with them *every day*!

Jesus is trying to teach the people that the same God who provided the manna in the wilderness, and who even provides our daily bread today,

is the same God who provides the *true* bread from heaven, that which gives life, and which feeds the world. And they said to Jesus, “Yes, yes, *that’s what we’re talking about, we want some of THAT bread!*”

And Jesus said to them, “*I AM that bread!*”

And they looked at Jesus kinda funny, and then said “*Aw man, we thought you were talking about something; you ain’t talking about nothing!*”

Then they started making fun of him, because he said he was the true bread from heaven. They said stuff like “How you gonna be from heaven when you know you grew up right around here? You think we don’t remember all the commotion that came with your birth?

Everybody going around calling you “Mary’s baby and Joseph’s maybe.”

And now you’re trying to tell us that you are the bread from heaven, sent from God? You have GOT to give me a break!

### III.

I know most of you don't have all of John 6 in front of you, because—like most good Lutherans—you don't bring your Bibles to church. But there are two places in the part of the chapter that I just paraphrased, where Jesus uses the word “believe.”

- When asked by the crowd in v. 29 *“What must we do to perform the works of God”*, Jesus said to them *“This is the work of God, that you believe in the one whom God has sent*
- When addressing the crowd that John the gospel writer saw as the opponents of Jesus in v. 47—those whom John called “the Jews”—Jesus said *“...whoever believes has eternal life.”*

It's no doubt in my mind that in a situation like Jesus finds himself this morning, he would use the word “believe” very purposefully, because Jesus is talking to people *who do not yet believe* in the manifestation of the kingdom of God on the levels that Jesus is trying to present it to them. These are either people who today would be considered

“seekers” (people who are looking for something to guide their life that makes sense to them), or those who would place themselves on a scale from *skeptical* to *downright hostile* to what Jesus has to say.

What Jesus is constantly challenging his hearers to wrap their minds around—hearers that include US this morning—is that what Jesus is trying to teach us will not, by any stretch of the imagination, fit into our already existing ontological or metaphorical categories. Just a few weeks ago, Jesus was trying to teach Nicodemus the same thing. Jesus says if you want to understand what I’m trying to tell you, you have to let go of everything you *think* you know about God, so God has room to do a new thing in you!

Watch this:

In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus announces that he is the living bread from heaven that needs to be eaten for eternal life, and that the bread that is given for the life of the world is his flesh. Then the question of the hour becomes, “How can this man give us his flesh to

eat?” The scriptures say this question was a point of dispute, contention, disagreement. Some were shocked; many were offended. As if THAT weren’t bad enough, Jesus said not only do you need to eat my flesh if you want to have life, but you have to drink my blood in order to have life too!

Now some of them REALLY thought the boy had lost his natural mind! In Deuteronomy and in Leviticus, the drinking of blood is *forbidden!* Surely, they thought, Jesus already knew that. What kind of rabbi wouldn’t already know that? These people were among those who heard the words of Jesus and applied them all to the physical level of life—that which you could see or touch or smell or hear or taste as we know of those senses.

But then there were others who began to understand that the physical level of understanding is not all that exists. There also exist levels of understanding that can take us up just a little bit higher, stretch us out just a little bit wider, allow us to see depths that are just a little bit

deeper. There are levels of understanding that only the Spirit of the Living God can transport us to, so that we can begin to see the “double-consciousness” that we as believers in God and followers of Christ Jesus need to see.

For example, the verb that is used for “eat” in our passage is also a word that means “feed on.” What it means, then, to *eat the flesh of Jesus* is that we “feed on” the words of eternal life—that which gives flesh to our faith—that Jesus communicates to us from God;

We “feed on” the amazing grace that is the nature of our Almighty God—the amazing grace that gives flesh to our faith—that Jesus brings to us from God as he forgives the woman caught in adultery;

We “feed on” the miraculous mercy that is in the nature of our Almighty God—the miraculous mercy that gives flesh to our faith—that Jesus brings to us from God as the woman with the flow of blood is healed just by touching the hem of Jesus’ garment;



We “feed on” the unconditional love that is the nature of our Almighty God—the unconditional love that gives flesh to our faith—that Jesus brings to us from God as he told the parables of the Good Samaritan, and the Prodigal Son;

We “feed on” the humility that our Almighty God wants us to have toward one another—the humility that gives flesh to our faith—that Jesus brings to us from God as he washed the feet of his disciples, and encouraged them to do the same;

We “feed on” the obedience that our Almighty God wants us to have toward the ways God would have us to go—the obedience that gives flesh to our faith—that Jesus brings to us from God as he obediently climbed up on a cross, after spending agonizing time asking God if there was another way.

But I’ve also been sent here to tell you today that Jesus is not just the BRINGER of the bread; Jesus IS the bread!

THAT is what it is about the flesh and blood of Jesus that gives life to the world: because the actual flesh and blood of Jesus WERE INDEED given to give life to the world. It's LOVE that gives life to the world, not HATE.

It's JUSTICE that gives life to the world, not INJUSTICE.

It's PEACE that gives life to the world, not WAR.

It's SHARING that gives life to the world, not GREED

It's INCLUSION that gives life to the world, not EXCLUSION

And we take a great big bite out of Jesus every time we stand up for love, and justice, and peace, and sharing , and inclusion. We bite into the flesh of Jesus, gnaw on the meat of his body, get down to the bone and suck out the marrow, because without all the things that Jesus died for, and all the things we as followers of Jesus are called to stand up for, there would be no life in the world! Humanity would be lifeless, and we would have no life in us...

But indeed we do have life.

Because Jesus died on the cross, but he didn't stay dead.

Because early one Sunday morning, he arose from death—in the flesh—and proclaimed victory over all those things that take life away from the world.

And just as graphic as gnawing on the flesh and gulping down the blood of Jesus sounds to us, is how graphic we are supposed to be with the ways we put flesh on our faith in the midst of the world.

So that when we take a bite out of Jesus, we don't keep it in our mouths! We don't hold it in our jaws! We don't keep it clenched in our teeth!

WE SPIT IT OUT

- In the streets of disrespect and disenfranchisement
- On the feet of injustice and racism
- In the face of sexism and white supremacy

And we announce that Jesus has ALREADY WON THE VICTORY over  
those things!

Amen.

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