

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – August 19, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

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John 6:51-58

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (52) Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (53) **Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. (54) Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. (55) For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. (56) Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. (57)** Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. (58) This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

Friends in Christ Jesus:

Dear friends,

The words of Jesus in our text are words that, if you really think about it, conjure up some pretty gross images—images of late night horror flicks and satanic rituals. Did you pay close attention to what Jesus said? *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood..."* And, *"for my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink."* What kind of language is that? His blood is real drink?! Are you kidding me? Why would Jesus talk like that? What does he mean by that? Those are the kinds of questions the Jews asked as they began arguing amongst themselves. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat," they asked.

My friends, these are some of the questions that we want to answer on the basis of God's Word, as we contemplate the fact that in John chapter 6:

Jesus Invites Us to Eat His Flesh

We'll consider:

1. What This Means
2. What It Offers

First, what does Jesus mean by "eat his flesh and drink his blood?" I'll bet that many of you immediately thought to yourself, "Well, I know what Jesus is talking about. Obviously, Jesus is talking about the Lord's Supper. This is where we take and eat Jesus' body and drink his blood. That must be what Jesus is referring to here in our text.

Although that seems quite logical to Christians who are familiar with the Lord's Supper, it's a wrong answer. Even though that would be the logical assumption, and even though there are a number of church bodies which interpret it that way, the fact is Jesus is not referring to the Sacrament of Holy Communion in this section. There are a number of reasons why we have to say that.

First, nowhere in Scripture are the terms the terms *"flesh and blood"* used as a reference to the Lord's Supper. Jesus and the Apostles always used the term "body and blood" not "flesh and blood" whenever they spoke about the Lord's Supper.

Secondly, at the time that Jesus spoke the words recorded here in John, there was no such thing as the Lord's Supper. Jesus had not yet instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion. He hadn't celebrated the Last Supper with his Disciples.

And finally, and maybe most importantly, nowhere in Scripture does Jesus ever say that you must receive the Lord's Supper to be saved, or that whoever partakes of the Sacrament will have eternal life. In fact, Scripture warns that there will be some who will receive this sacrament to their judgment. **So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in**

an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ... (29) For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. (1 Corinthians 11:27,29 NIV)

Scripture also teaches that there will be many who will be saved without ever celebrating the Lord's Supper. Think for example of the OT believers or children who have been baptized and yet die before they are old enough to examine themselves and come to the Lords' table. How about the thief on the cross? Jesus promised him paradise, even though he wasn't in a position to take and eat the body of Jesus in Holy Communion.

Now, contrast those facts with what Jesus says about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, in our text. ***"Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*** Did you hear what Jesus said? Jesus said you have to eat his flesh to be saved. And again, ***"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. And I will raise him up at the last day."*** Notice there's no question about it. There's no "whoever eats and drinks might drink judgment on himself." No, it's: ***"whoever eats the Lord's flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life."*** That cannot be a merely a reference to the Lord's Supper.

If Jesus is not talking about, eating and drinking his body and blood in the Lord's Supper; then what is he talking about? What does he mean when he talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood? In order to answer that question we need to consider the entire context of these words. If you remember from the gospel readings we have heard over the last number of weeks, Jesus spoke the words of our text shortly after he had miraculously fed the crowd of 5000. Remember, after Jesus had performed that miracle, the people followed him around the lake, looking for more miracle-food, with which they could fill their stomachs. When Jesus took them to task for being more concerned about their bodies than their souls, the Jews ask Jesus to give them a miraculous sign to believe in. They said, in effect, "C'mon Jesus, Moses gave us bread from heaven to eat. How about you? What will you give us?" Jesus' response? ***Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. (33) For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."*** Jesus continued, ***"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*** (John 6:32-33, 35 NIV)

Do you understand what Jesus is doing here? He's taking the picture of bread from heaven, the manna that the people were to eat-and he's applying it to himself. He's saying that he is the true bread from heaven. He's the one who will nourish more than their bodies. He's the one who will nourish the souls. He's come to give them spiritual life. That's the connection he's made between the manna bread and himself as bread. Now, in the section we have as our text, Jesus takes that illustration to the next level. What do you do with bread? You eat it, right? So if Jesus is the bread of life, what are we to do with him? Yes, we are to eat him. That's the point Jesus is making here. ***"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."***

Now, the real question is, "What does Jesus mean by the words, "eat his flesh?" Jesus himself explains. Remember Jesus' words to the people, ***"I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:35 NIV)*** My friends, that's what Jesus means by saying, "eat my flesh and drink my blood." He means simply, "Believe in him. Trust in him completely. Lay hold of him as your Lord and Savior."

Isn't that exactly what the crowds around Jesus needed to hear? They were all concerned about getting another easy meal. They wanted to know what they must do to do the work God requires. They were looking every direction but the right one. Jesus says, "Right here, friends. If you want true nourishment, if you want fulfillment, if you want life that never ends, then you must come to me," Jesus says. ***"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** (John 14:6 NIV)

Do you think Jesus' words to the people then still have application for our lives today? Absolutely! How often aren't you and I tempted to do the same thing these people around Jesus did? First, we are far too concerned about what's going into our stomach, what kind of clothes we're wearing, whether our homes are paid for, whether our health is good or whether

our lives are carefree. We are worried about getting enough physical bread. Secondly, we are tempted to treat God as if he's merely our helper -- Someone who does nice things for us once in awhile or makes our life comfortable on occasion. But not someone we're terribly close to, not someone we're terribly dependent upon. It's like, "God, I can use you, but I don't really need you."

That attitude, my friends, is idolatry. It's self-righteousness. It's built into us, and if we cling to it, we will certainly be damned! That is what we deserve from a just and holy God. That fact ought to have us all on our knees saying, "God have mercy on me, a sinner." And, you know; that's exactly what God has done, isn't it? He has had mercy on us. For no good reason on our part, he said, "I will take your sins upon me. I will, in effect, become your sin and in exchange, you can become my holiness." And how does this great exchange become your personal possession? How does it get credited to your account? It becomes yours by believing it. By saying, "Jesus, I believe that you are my only hope." You are my life ring. No, you are my everything! You are all that I need and all that I want. As the psalmist put it, "**Earth has nothing I desire besides you.**" (*Psalm 73:25 NIV*)

My friends, that's what Jesus is inviting you and me to do in these words. He's inviting us to cling to him. To throw off any hope we have of saving ourselves and lay hold of him, take him deep into our heart. Digest his promises. Lay claim to Jesus as God in the flesh and your only Savior from sin. That's what Jesus means by eating his flesh and drinking his blood." He means, believe in him.

Now, if we do that, that is, if by the power of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit leads us to put our trust in Jesus, what promises does God make us? Or, to put it in the terminology, that Jesus uses here,

II. What does Eating Jesus' Flesh Offer Us?

Jesus says it offers a number of things. We just heard Jesus say that whoever eats his flesh has eternal life. Most of the people who ate the manna in the desert died-forever. But, those who eat of Jesus, the Bread of Life, will live forever.

Jesus also says that *whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood remains in him and he in them*. In other words, it is faith in Jesus Christ that intimately connects us to him and he to us. As long as we are connected to Christ, God will give us the strength to be the kind of patient, loving, caring parents, spouses, children and employees that God has called us to be. Isn't that what Jesus means when he says in John 15, "*If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.*" (*John 15:5 NIV*)

The only question left for us to answer is, "How, exactly, do we go about strengthening our connection to Christ? How do we fully eat his flesh and drink his blood? Well, there are only two ways for Jesus to come to us and allow us to partake of him.

First of all, Jesus comes to us is through his Word. The more we know about Jesus' life, his words, his will for our lives, the more we have to chew on and believe in, and apply to our lives. When our fall programs begin in a couple of weeks here at Good Shepherd you will have the opportunity to enjoy a full course menu of God's Word, offered in various styles for young and old alike. All of them offer the kind of spiritual food that can truly nourish your soul and positively affect your life. Or, as Jesus put it in our text, all of them will give you a chance to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Of course I'm talking about the various Bible study opportunities we have such as our Sunday School program, our confirmation classes and our adult and teen Bible studies. These opportunities are not just intended for a select few – they are prepared with all of the members of our congregation in mind. They provide spiritual food – a chance to eat Jesus flesh and to drink his blood.

And then of course there is the Sacrament of Holy Communion. There, through a sacramental eating, Jesus does offer his body and blood, in with, and under the bread and wine. Through the forgiveness of sins that God offers in his Sacrament, Jesus restores the relationship your sins destroyed between you and him. In the gift of forgiveness, you can, in fact, depart in peace.

May God enable each one of us to enjoy the blessings that come to us through the use of his Word and Sacrament.
Amen.