

Sermon ✝ August 15, 2021

John 6:51-69

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Last week I mentioned that for a number of weeks, the readings from John's gospel revolve around the theme of Jesus being the bread of life. So, last Sunday, I used the text from Ephesians for my sermon. This morning, I will be preaching on John's gospel but also using a portion of the lesson from John for next Sunday.

So . . . this is a continuation of the gospel lesson that I just read:

Jesus said, *“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”* He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, *“This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?”* . . . Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, *“Do you also wish to go away?”* Simon Peter answered him, *“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

Jesus said that he is the bread that has come down from heaven and that everyone who eats that bread will live forever. What are we to make of those words—that Jesus is the bread of heaven!

We find these bread words *sandwiched* in the middle of the Gospel of John. From reading the New Testament, we see that Jesus was good at *slicing* to the heart of a matter. Quite often, what Jesus said got a *rise* out of people. He had a kind of *wry* wit about him. Okay, enough of this *crummy, half-baked* humor. Together let us explore what Jesus meant when he said that he is the bread of heaven.

The Gospel of John is known for the creative ways that Jesus refers to himself. It is in John that Jesus announces that *“I am the good shepherd.”*

In our minds, we conjure up pleasant images, of green fields, gently flowing streams and cool winds blowing with Jesus watching over us like a shepherd watches over his flock.

Or elsewhere in John, Jesus proclaims, *“I am the vine and you are the branches.”* Again, serene pictures come into our minds as we envision ivy-covered walls and grape vineyards. We think of life and growth and beauty.

But here in this passage, Jesus gives us another *“I am”* saying, but this one is not so pleasant. Jesus starts off by declaring that he is the bread of life, that he is the bread of heaven that has come down to earth, so that people might have a share in eternal life. That Jesus is the bread of life is not such

a bad image. But then Jesus ups the ante.

He goes on to say that this bread that he gives us is his flesh, and that those who do not eat his flesh and drink his blood will not share in eternal life. What are we to make of Jesus' words?

One Sunday morning, during a worship service, the priest of a certain church was saying the familiar words: “*This is my body which is broken for you. And this is my blood which is shed for you,*” when all of a sudden a small girl sitting in the sanctuary cried out: “*Yuck.*” The members of the church looked at the girl with horrified and shocked faces. Perhaps that little girl had a greater appreciation of what was taking place than anyone else there.

What are we to make of Jesus' words when he says that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood? At first, it sounds a lot like cannibalism, and many people in the Roman Empire believed that Christians were just that—cannibals.

What Jesus is saying here and what he is saying throughout the Gospels is that faith in him means far more than just believing that he exists. Rather, if we have faith in Jesus we are going to make him a part of our very lives, just as the food we eat and the beverages we drink become a part of our being. But not everyone understands that is what faith means.

*“We aren't sure which church to go to. But we figure that it really doesn't matter, since all that is important is that we believe in God.”* Sad thing is many people think that's all it takes . . . that everything is going to be just fine so long as we believe in God. The problem is that for many people believing in God is not much different than believing in UFO's or believing in Big Foot or believing in the Loch Ness monster.

Just because we believe that there is a God is not going to get us far. The Bible itself reminds us that the devil believes in God. The way we use the word *believe* today has emptied it of any meaning.

Asking someone if they believe in Jesus is a pointless question. Probably the best word is *trust*. Do we *trust* in God? Do we *trust* in Jesus Christ?

When we ask someone if they trust in Jesus Christ, we are asking not only if they believe that he exists, but we are also asking if that belief affects the way that they live.

Again, in our passage from John, Jesus said that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood. In other words, we must take Jesus and make him a part of ourselves. By trusting in Jesus we try to live our lives after the pattern that Jesus lived his. So in trusting Jesus, we say “*yes*” to him not only with our minds but also with our whole being.

Are we willing to say “*yes*” to Jesus not just with what we say, but with how we live our lives? That requires a decision on our part.

The Bible tells us that after Jesus spoke these words, many who had been following him around stopped doing so. When they saw what kind of a total commitment it would take, many people

decided that they just were not interested. So Jesus turned to the twelve disciples and asked if they also would like to leave.

But Peter spoke up for the whole group and said: “*Jesus, there is no other place to go. We have come to see that you are the only way to eternal life.*”

And our faith asks the same question of us. Do we want to go with him or do we prefer to stay behind?

Several years ago a man was discovered, who had been marooned alone for a long time on a small island in the Pacific Ocean. A passing ship was all ready to rescue him, but he refused to go. It seems that while he was on the island, he had made a pet out of a monkey that he had found. The ship had strict regulations that no animals were permitted to be on board. So the man let the ship leave without him.

Jesus comes to us like a rescue ship. Do we go with him or do we have some excuse to stay behind?

We are compelled to make a life or death decision. If we say “yes”, not just with our voices but with our very lives, then we choose the path that leads to eternal life. As always, the choice is ours. May we choose wisely.