

*The Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost*

August 26, 2012

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John 6:51-58

*I am the living bread that came 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.” Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “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. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 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. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”*

It has already started. It is only going to intensify over the next three months. It will be a war of words. Each side will make their case, each side will offer promises, each side will tell us why we need to trust and follow them. There will be many words and much debate. Of course, I am talking about the Presidential campaign as two different men will be seeking your one vote. But some people feel that the words and promises of politicians are a bit hard to swallow. People have a hard time believing everything they hear from them. In fact, candidates will say things that people do not like and do not want to hear. On the other side there are other people who are completely behind their candidates and back them all the way. Some will eat up every word their man has to say. They have faith that they are supporting the right person.

There is a much larger campaign that has also already started. Jesus' Word continues to go out into all the world. The Gospel is still being preached to all creation. Jesus speaks some words that are shocking. Jesus makes promises that appear way too good to be true. Jesus is not out to win our vote, but to win us. He wants us to trust and follow Him. Some will be skeptical. Some will not like what Jesus has to say. Some will not want to hear from Jesus anymore. But others will eat up every Word, their Man, their Savior has to say. They will trust and follow Jesus all the way to heaven. As we listen to Jesus today I want us to see with the Holy Spirit's aide how: **Faith Feasts on Jesus.**

Jesus' words continue on how He is the bread of life. If you have been to church every week lately you might recognize we have been here for our Gospel reading in John chapter six for a pretty long time now – 4 weeks and counting to be exact. This week and next we get into the reaction to Jesus' words. Many are a bit skeptical. They find Jesus' words difficult to digest. The crowds follow Jesus seeking earthly bread from an earthly king but walk away disappointed after listening to what Jesus has to say. For Jesus keeps telling them this truth: *“I am the living bread that came 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.”* When we think about it and put ourselves into the shoes of those listening aren't these words a bit shocking? Would they not be difficult to accept?

Here is this man from Nazareth saying He came down from heaven? Here is a man calling Himself bread and not just any bread but living bread that gives you eternal life. He calls His flesh bread and says He will give it for the life of the world. Perhaps we can understand just a bit why ***“the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’”*** Did the Jews actually think Jesus was urging cannibalism – telling them they needed to eat his flesh? Or did they understand the point Jesus was making as He was talking about a spiritual eating? Did they understand Jesus was saying that He is the source of life, that only He and not their works could bring them back to God, and that He would give up His life for the world so that the people of the world could have life forever? Either way they disagree with Jesus’ words saying: ***“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”***

Every Pastor has heard it many times from those outside the church: *“But Pastor, that just isn’t the way I see it!”* That is a natural response to almost any doctrine of the Bible – creation, the incarnation, the dual nature of Christ. *“How can you see everything was created in six days? How can you believe a virgin gave birth to a child? How can you say Jesus is fully true God and at the same time fully true man?”* Yes, this is the natural response to even the most important and chief doctrine of the Bible - that we are saved by grace through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus. Our natural response to grace is that this can’t be the way to be saved. There must be something we have to do. If I am better than other people then surely I deserve more from God! How can God say all you have to do is believe in Jesus to have eternal life? There is always a great danger in placing our human reason against the Words of Christ – to say: *“how can He say that!”* That is why we need to lay down all of our own opinions and our own wisdom and our own misunderstandings and foolishness at the foot of the cross. There we see the wisdom and the power of God to save. Only there do these words of Jesus start to make sense.

Jesus repeats His words even more emphatically. ***“Jesus said to them, ‘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. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 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.’”*** Jesus doesn’t even think about backing off from His Word. He continues to confront them with the truth about Himself. He tells them without Him they have no life. Sinners who do not “eat and drink” the crucified Son of God are forever lost. But those who have faith that feasts on Him have eternal life and Jesus will raise them up on the last day.

The word Jesus uses for eating in these verses is one the English language does not catch. He uses a different word which literally means to keep gnawing or crunching. It was often used of animals feeding. Think of how animals eat loudly and enthusiastically gulping down their food. Jesus wants people to eat and drink of Him with the same intensity. ***“For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”*** Again these words are a bit shocking. What is Jesus saying when He says to eat His flesh and drink His blood? Some think this is a reference to the Lord’s Supper. However, this would not fit for several reasons. Jesus has not instituted the Lord’s Supper yet. Also when speaking about the Lord’s Supper Jesus uses the Greek word for body, but here the

word for flesh is used. The Lord's Supper, while it forgives sins and offers salvation, nowhere is it demanded as an absolute requirement to have life as this eating and drinking is here. Finally, the context has nothing to do with the Lord's Supper.

Since this flesh and blood isn't referring to the Lord's Supper, what does this mean? It means only faith in Jesus saves. This is a spiritual eating and drinking. For Jesus is real. Our faith is placed in a real person. God was made flesh for us. He offered Himself, real flesh and blood, on the cross for the life of the world. The blood that poured down from that cross at Calvary was real blood – blood shed to bring you and me real forgiveness. When the grave was empty – a real flesh and blood Savior appeared to assure us death is defeated. Our faith is not based on human ideals or opinions, but on a real flesh and blood Savior who came for us. Jesus is saying to have life with God here and forever we need faith that feasts on Him. ***“This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”***

That is quite a promise, isn't it? Jesus promises that you will live forever. Jesus tells you all you need to live is Him. Jesus assures you that He will raise you up on the last day. Jesus tells you that He really is the bread of life that came down from heaven for you so that never again will you hunger, never again will you thirst. Jesus says whoever eats His ***“flesh and drinks (His) blood (whoever believes) has eternal life.”*** This is the Gospel, the good news for all of the world. While much of the world still hears it and responds with the crowd saying *“how can He say that?”* I pray God gives us a faith that feasts on Jesus.

Perhaps as the Presidential campaign continues we might get tired of hearing the war of words, all the flattering promises, and all the reasons we should cast our vote for one side. People often suggest it is best to just avoid discussing politics because it can cause passion and sometimes heated debate. Many times people will lump religion into the same category as politics. While religion certainly might also cause passion and debate, there is a big difference in the campaign run by Jesus. He will never back down from His Word because His Word never fails. His promises are never empty. His guarantees are better than gold. He offers Himself for the world to save the world. He came to win us and that is what He has done. I pray we eat up every Word this Savior now has to say with a faith that feasts on Him – the Bread of Life. Amen.