

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

08/19/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus said,] ⁵¹“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” ⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So 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. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This 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.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bread and Community

Good morning! I warned you a few weeks ago, in the Gospel of John Jesus talks a lot about bread, and here we are again. Today's Gospel lesson begins with what is basically a recap and summary of everything that Jesus has said over the last few weeks. *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."* It's a call for everyone to come and experience the fullness of life that God is offering.

One of the ways that we do that today is by participating in the Eucharist. In the Lord's Supper, Mass, or Holy Communion, whatever your preferred name is, we are given the body and blood of Jesus Christ. When we are given this sacrament we have forgiveness of sins, and as Jesus says today; *"Whoever eats of this bread will live forever..."* Now, here is what's so interesting about that statement. If you open your Bibles sometime to the four Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you will notice something unique about how the "last supper" is celebrated by Jesus and the disciples. In Matthew, Mark and Luke we have the traditional account of the meal with the institution of the Lord's Supper. What I say at the table every week is found in those three Gospels. Things are different in the Gospel of John. There, we have no institution of the Lord's Supper, and so after sharing his last meal with the disciples in the upper room, Jesus gives one last teaching lesson and washes the disciples' feet.

This has led to many scholars going through every word of the Gospel of John trying to piece together the call to take the Eucharist. I'm sure it won't come as a surprise, but our

readings over the last few weeks are usually the top contenders. It's easy to see why. The mention of bread and eternal life sure sound similar, and while it's weird to imagine that the writer of the Gospel of John would leave out something so important, I think we end up rushing to force something that might not necessarily be there. When we look at today's text, and when we take together the picture of everything Jesus has said over the last few weeks, what we have is something that I would call sacramental. It's impossible to not see connections between that holy meal and the promise that Jesus is offering us in the words of the Gospel of John.

Now here's the cool thing, and this is why I'll always say that it's important to understand the Greek, what Jesus offers in today's reading isn't a promise to get eternal life down the road, it's a invitation to eternal life now. Listen to the words of Dr. Susan Hulen:

*"We are familiar with modern theological assertions that followers of Jesus go to heaven. In addition, the phrase "eternal life," when used in the Synoptic Gospels (that's a nickname for Matthew, Mark, and Luke) often refers to the resurrected life... John has something different in mind with the phrase "eternal life." This life is available to believers in the present and not only in the future. Jesus says "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life" (John 6:54) and "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). The verbs are present tense. The life Jesus brings begins during the life of the believer and during Jesus' own incarnate existence on earth."*¹

Now, that's just cool, right? It's those things we can often miss when we look at the text in English. But there it is, an invitation to something right here and now that can give us a taste of life forever.

¹https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3745

I love it here at St. Paul's; it truly is a unique community. A lot of churches say stuff like that, they all SAY they're a wonderful and loving place that feels like family, but that isn't always the case. Here at St. Paul's we get it right more times than not, and that's saying something. My challenge for you today is to keep making sure that happens. I want this place to be sacramental, a thin place where God's grace and glory can shine through.

A lot of the time we look at the world and we feel defeated, it can look so bad, so impossibly challenging, that we are overwhelmed. Christians have been guilty of letting the status quo sneak by because we have the promise that "one day, God's gonna make all this better." But, if we can learn anything from today's text, it's that life forever isn't just something that we need to wait around for, it's an open invitation to experience the fullness of life here and now! If the world seems like a mess, do something about it! Help make the world into the sacramental place God is calling us towards! St. Paul's is far from perfect, but in this place, around that table, we can come together and work together to get out of God's way, letting God make this place into the fullness of that community that we all love so much already.

It began 2,000 years ago, it began when you were baptized, it begins now! Come together, celebrate our differences, love one another and experience the fullness that God has been offering us all along. Amen.