

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

08/18/2024

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.”

Prayer

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

Amen.

Flesh and Blood

Good morning! My younger brother and I are only 13 months apart. So, our childhood looked a lot more like raising twins than anything else. (I guess it's rather fitting that he now has actual twins!) My sister, who is five years older than I am, had "prepared" my parents for raising another, but like most first borns, my sister Erin was well behaved, organized, and well adjusted. And then my brother and I came along. While generalizations are never perfect, there really is something about raising two boys that seems to ring true in the universe. I especially was trouble, dismantling every single electrical outlet cover the store had in under 30 seconds. My mom was forced to call poison control a few times on us, and we once in complete silence colored the wall with purple crayon while my aunt was babysitting. But it was at dinner that our feral nature really shined. I'm told that when my mother made spaghetti an older girl across the street would come over just to watch the disaster that was created as we ate.

Now, it may come as a surprise, but our rather impolite eating has some strange similarities with our Gospel lesson today! The Bread of Life discourse continues, and if you're tired of it, I'm sorry, because we still have one more week before we're finished with this section of the Gospel of John. As in previous weeks, we overlap a verse to remind ourselves of the lesson as a whole. But the tone today takes a noticeable shift. Whereas before the language was about bread, we shift towards the eating of flesh and blood in the reading today.

The crowd rightly becomes confused and upset. Jewish law forbade the eating of meat that wasn't kosher, meat that hadn't been drained of blood. The eating of human flesh, cannibalism, was also especially abhorrent. What was Jesus talking about?! But as if that wasn't enough, Jesus raises the bar, with language that is easy for us to miss in the English

translation. Thankfully, my seminary Greek professor Dr. Brian K. Peterson can help us out.

He writes: *“Jesus again engages in ‘obnoxious discourse.’ When the crowd is bothered and confused by Jesus’ claim to give his flesh, he makes an even more offensive statement: they will need to eat his flesh and drink his blood (verse 53). The vocabulary of the text only heightens the scandal. In verses 49-51, Jesus had spoken about ‘eating’ the bread from heaven, using a very common word (esthio). In verse 53, however, Jesus switches to a less common word, trogo, a rather onomatopoeic word that has a connotation closer to ‘munch’ or ‘gnaw.’ It is a graphic word of noisy eating, the sort of eating an animal does. The audibility of the eating, however, is not the important point; this is eating that is urgent, even desperate. It is eating as though life depends on it, because it does.”*¹

Remember that last part, it will be important later.

But it’s here that we need a refresher. I’m sure you all have every single sermon I’ve given memorized, but in case you missed one, let’s set the scene. This long conversation that Jesus gives occurs after his feeding of the multitudes, the only miracle, or “sign,” that occurs in all four Gospels. This is a teaching moment to the crowd in response to that event. The whole speech is an invitation on Jesus’ part to dive more deeply into an understanding of who he is and what he has come to do. But the crowds are hung up on the actual event. “Let’s see the fancy trick again! Please!” I mean, I don’t blame them! I’m equally captivated by fancy lights and bright colors. But as we will see next week, as Jesus dives more deeply into the lesson, the crowds and the disciples become more and more unwilling to

¹<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-20-2/commentary-on-john-651-58-2>

listen and follow. I think that it is a universal truth that the harder the lesson that God is trying to teach us, the more negatively we respond.

But it's time for another refresher. Remember that in the Gospel of John we don't have the traditional institution of the last supper. If you turn to the end of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus eats a final meal at Passover in the upper room, giving us those words that we recite every week. *"This is my body, given for you, this is my blood, given for you."* But the Gospel of John is unique and different. In this Gospel Jesus is arrested before Passover and killed that day. He literally becomes the sacrificial lamb that once saved the Israelites in Egypt, but which now will save the world.

In this light, the Bread of Life discourse of the past few weeks becomes a reflection on the Eucharist. It's an invitation to delve more deeply in the mystery of this wonderful meal. But it's a reminder that it's about more than just bread and wine, flesh and blood. As Dr. Peterson writes: *"We may rightly hear in this text the claim that an abiding relationship with Jesus himself is the heart and the gift of the Eucharist. However, it might pick up the emphasis of the text better to say that while this part of chapter 6 certainly brings to mind the Eucharist, it is not primarily about the Eucharist. It is primarily about Jesus himself as the food of eternal life from the Father."*²

Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, this meal, like all sacraments, serve as earthly elements that point to Jesus' promise of eternal life in God. Remember when I told you to remember Dr. Peterson's earlier point? He wrote that *"it is eating as though life depends on it, because it does."* We gather together around that table so that we can be

² Ibid.

reminded of the promise that God has made, of the promise made in our baptisms, of the hope and joy that this life has meaning and purpose beyond the material. In this food we are drawn closer to God, which I think in the end was the point all along. Amen.