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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
25 August 2024

Sermon on John 6:51-69

Worship Theme:

“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE”: THE ONLY FOOD WE REALLY NEED

As Jesus concluded his Bread of Life discourse, many said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” and walked away. Jesus was teaching that the only chance to enjoy eternity in heaven is through a close connection to him. He is the only bread that gives eternal life. That isn't hard to understand, but it is hard to accept. Eating this bread means reordering our lives so that Jesus is by far our highest priority. It means realizing that Jesus is the only thing we really need.

Sermon Theme: **“Jesus, the Bread of Life”**

1. Teaches Hard Things
2. Repeats Words of Life

Grace, and mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Jesus is the Bread of Life, the most perfect spiritual food to feed our souls, food that is absolutely sufficient. To eat the Bread of Life means to believe in Jesus as the one sent from heaven by the Father to be the Savior from sin for all people. It is impossible for anyone to choose or come to Jesus on our own; so in his infinite mercy and grace, the Triune God draws us to himself and gives us faith to trust and believe in him. This you know and this you've heard if you've been here at St. John's for the past two Sundays. (If you missed last week or the week before, I strongly encourage you to go back and watch those sermons on our Youtube page!) Today is our third and final day exploring Jesus' “Bread of Life Discourse.”

Last week we heard what it means to “eat” this Bread of Life. Today we see what happens when **Jesus the Bread of Life Teaches Hard Things** and emphasizes that we are to eat not just any bread, but THIS bread, Jesus himself. This Bread of Life is not to be one course of many in a larger spiritual meal – no, Jesus is to be the ONLY course, the ONLY Savior in whom we believe. “*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.*” That is incredibly exclusive language! Jesus is claiming to be the ONE AND ONLY way anybody can live forever.

And people don't like that. In fact, we react quite harshly to it! My sinful human nature wants to believe that there will always be something I can do to win my special place in eternity, or at the very least that I have the capability to contribute to it. Countless societies and religions throughout time and history have only confirmed that further, reinforcing in us this idea that you get only what you pay for and you receive only what you earn. Add the popular notions that “all

roads lead to heaven" and "there are many paths to God", and it's no wonder people get confused and riled up about this. We're told in John 6, *The Jews began to argue sharply among themselves... (and) on hearing [what Jesus said], many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"*

Notice, "other people in other religions" are not the only ones who struggle with Jesus' words here. This is a very hard teaching for any people to accept. It's worth briefly explaining our terms here. "Hard" does not mean difficult to understand, but rather a controversial and offensive idea that doesn't easily fit with the common thoughts of the day. And when we use the word "accept" here, we certainly don't mean accepting Jesus into our hearts or choosing to believe in him, because we heard just last Sunday that we can never do that – God must be the one who draws us to himself, not the other way around. Yet regardless of how "hard" *this teaching is to accept*, it must be accepted as true. Jesus is, always has been, and always will be the only way to heaven, and nothing anybody on earth says or does will ever change that. As Paul said to the Galatians, "Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you [i.e. the gospel about Jesus], let them be under God's curse!" (Gal. 1:8)

Why do Jesus, Paul, and we today speak so intensely about all these things and insist so strongly upon them? Because there is no other gospel. There is no other God, there is no other Savior, and there can never be any other way to eternal life in heaven. Jesus is the one and only way, and it doesn't matter at all how offensive anyone may find that teaching to be, because it's real and true.

From that time on, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. The truth of God's Word will always offend a sinful human heart. Our hearts want to believe that we can take care of ourselves. Our hearts want to believe that the things we accomplish will be glamorous enough to catch the eye of the Almighty and earn his praise and adoration. Our hearts want to believe that there really is no need for Jesus because "I'm not actually that bad of a person, and in fact I think I'm pretty good, especially compared to so many others around me!" And if God's Word doesn't agree with my sinful heart, my heart will always urge me to abandon that God and to find another one who won't be nearly as offensive or exclusive. No human heart will ever agree with Jesus' teaching here, or anywhere else in Scripture for that matter.

Unless and until, of course, that heart is changed by God. God in his infinite mercy and grace was not willing to let sinful people wander away forever, destined for eternal torture in the fires of hell. So God spoke. He spoke through prophets, poets, judges, teachers, apostles, and most of all, God spoke through his Son who took on human flesh and physically entered this world. And **Jesus, the bread of life that came down from heaven, said, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life!"** In other words, there is nothing you or any other person or any other "god" can do to contribute to eternal life, because eternal life is won for us only by the mission and work of the Savior and then given to us freely as a gift by the Holy Spirit. How do we know all this? "The words I have spoken to you."

God's Word is fully backed by his almighty power and authority, and therefore God's Word alone is able to create and strengthen faith in Jesus, thereby connecting us to him and giving us every single blessing Jesus won for us. God's Word lacks nothing because GOD lacks nothing – it is everything we ever need and more. And because our hearts naturally want nothing to do with any of this, our gracious God doesn't speak only once, or even twice; no, our gracious God speaks these words over and over again – **Jesus, the Bread of Life, Repeats Words of Life** because he wants us to hear them, know them, and receive all the benefits of them.

A heart that has been changed by God and filled with faith in Jesus rejoices whenever it hears these wonderful words, openly and willingly confessing that Jesus is in fact the one and only way to eternal life. But understand that this isn't a "Law teaching" of exclusivity, as if we're trying to keep people away from God and heaven. No, this is an incredibly wonderful Gospel teaching – it's Good News! If someone wants to know how to live forever in a perfect paradise with the God of unending grace, mercy, peace, and love, THERE IS A WAY TO DO THAT!!! The separation that sin caused between us and God has been overcome by his mercy, and our sin is paid for and gone, all because of Jesus.

When so many people were walking away from Jesus, he invited his disciples to react – *"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.* By the amazing grace of God, *Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."* By the same amazing grace of the same amazing God, that same confession of faith is ours still today. We never apologize for claiming that Jesus is the one and only way to heaven, because he is! And we don't say that because we want people kept out of heaven, but rather because we want them IN heaven! We want them to hear and receive the same good news we heard so that they'll be with us forever! It's a hard teaching for natural sinful hearts to believe, because it's so contrary to everything we think we know; but it's a wonderful teaching and demonstration of God's love, and therefore we rejoice that it's true.

So what does this mean for us right now? After all, by the grace of God we have faith which believes all this, but we're also not in heaven yet! So in the meantime, it means we get to rejoice every day that we are chosen and dearly loved members of God's holy family. We get to feast regularly on the words of life our Savior speaks, receiving peace and strength for our souls. We get to openly live our confession of faith that Jesus is the one and only way to heaven by prioritizing our time with him and treating it as the tremendous blessing it really is. Jesus came to give his life to take away every sin and to save all the people of the world, therefore this message needs to be spoken and proclaimed everywhere it possibly can be! That means WE get to share this beautiful message with others so that they too may know Jesus and live for all eternity with him in heaven.

For three whole weeks we got to explore Jesus' incredible words in John 6. When boiled down, it's not too complicated or difficult to understand, and for that we thank God. (1) Jesus is the Bread of Life that came down from heaven to fill

people with eternal spiritual food. (2) We eat Jesus the Bread of Life by believing in him and trusting him as our Savior from sin, not because we were able to come to him on our own, but rather because the Triune God drew us to himself and gave us faith to believe in him. (3) And we praise him that he did, because Jesus the Bread of Life is the one and only way to eternal life – there is no other option! By the grace of God, that option has been clearly shown and opened to us, removing our sins forever and preparing our home in eternal life. Our gracious God reveals everything we need to know for eternity, **Teaching even the Hard Things** and mercifully **Repeating Words of Life**, all because of his great love for us.

Let's pray:

Lord God, you are gracious and generous so far beyond what we deserve. You allow us to study your Word together and to grow in our faith and knowledge of you. We confess it is not always easy for us to grasp and believe, so we give you thanks that you continue loving us and repeating your words of life. You insisted on following your plan instead of our plan, and for that very reason we are saved from our sins forever. Help us to live each day in this world rejoicing that you are our Savior, our Bread of Life, with whom we will live in perfect peace forever.

Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.