

The True Bread of Life

John 6:35-51

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

August 9, 2015 – Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

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In the name of Jesus, the Bread of Life come down from heaven. Amen. In this morning's Gospel – specifically where our Lord was speaking to the Jews, saying: "I AM the Bread come down from heaven" – people responded with murmuring, grumbling and complaining. "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say: 'I came down from heaven?'" Never mind the fact that Jesus' words came only as a result of their earlier request that He give them that Bread of which one may eat and never die. Never mind that He was only telling them the wonderful Good News that before them stood the very Savior of the world – the only Hope of fallen mankind – and that those who placed their trust in Him would never die, but enjoy an eternity with Him in heaven!

On hearing this wonderful Good News you'd think they would have been ecstatic – not so! Instead they said: "Oh no! That can't be true. This is just Jesus – that Kid who used to live in Nazareth, the carpenter's Son. His mom and dad and He moved here years ago. We've known Him since he was a Boy. There's nothing special about Him. How can He be babbling on about having come down from heaven? He must be lying or massively confused." So, when the multitudes who'd gone chasing after our Lord received what they had come for, they were offended by it. They grumbled, murmured and complained – just like Israel of old.

Why do you suppose this happened? Well, look at Elijah in this morning's Old Testament Lesson. Soon after God had given him victory on Mount Carmel over the 450 prophets of Baal whom Elijah had put to death, the prophet caught wind of Jezebel's threat to take his life for slaying all her so-called holy men, and he was scared to death. Elijah had singlehandedly triumphed over 450 men who had a great following, yet he still feared for his life and ran away. He ran straight from Mt. Carmel south about 90 miles to Beersheba – where, leaving his servant, he traveled another day's journey into the desert and collapsed under a broom tree. Exhausted, he gave up and cried out to God: "Lord, I've had enough! Just take my life!"

What had happened in such a short time that Elijah was able to go from an amazing victory over his enemies to abject despair? Well, the answer to the questions: "Why did the children of Israel murmur against both God and His Christ?" and "Why did Elijah give up?" is one and the same. Each had allowed human reason to triumph over faith. And when human reason

looked at the situation they were facing, and when they had to decide whether God would actually deliver on His promise, it always faltered – because when you elevate human reason over faith, human reason will often win out, hands down.

Now I'm not suggesting human reason is a bad thing. Indeed in the affairs of this life and world, reason is a good and gracious gift from God – and ought to be used. To be sure, it's this good gift that enables you to decide whether to buy or sell – make a decision about what's good for your body and physical well-being – or make a judgment regarding which candidate seems best-suited to serve as president, governor, mayor, or whatever. On the basis of God-given human reason you might choose for yourself a career to embark upon – or what the best course of action might be in any particular situation.

But in the things concerning the Spirit – the things God demands on the one hand or promises on the other – human reason **cannot** be trusted – but only that Word which proceeds from the mouth of God. **Here** you must heed **only** the Word of God. You must "trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." Fallen human reason asks: "How are we going to make it out here in this wilderness with no food or water?" – "How am I going survive when wicked queen Jezebel has a bounty on my head?" – "How can Someone who appears so common – who's been living among us for so long, and whose parents are also in our midst – say He is the One who has come down from heaven?" – "How is it, since we can't see it, that the Church is able to make the claim that God is actually present here in this place built with wood, block and mortar – that He speaks His very own words of forgiveness through the mouths of His Pastors – that the Holy Spirit creates faith through mere water and Word in Holy Baptism – or that the Son of God gives us His very body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins, in, with, and under simple bread and wine in the Supper?"

Here in this text our Lord is teaching us to muzzle the ox of human reason in matters of the Christian faith so that we might simply trust Him and His promises. Were the children of Israel not fed by God with a morning meal of manna, and an evening meal of quail throughout their 40 years in the wilderness? Was Elijah not sustained by the Lord on just two meals as he traveled through the desert those 40 days from Beersheba to

Mt. Horeb – a distance of nearly 250 miles? Were the multitudes not fed by the hand of our Savior with only five barley loaves and two fish? And was this feeding not a sign infinitely greater than the sign the crowd wrongly attributed to Moses – since it was actually produced by the very God of Creation come down from heaven in human flesh – the One who was now standing before them? Yet human reason still continues to doubt. It murmurs, complains, and always asks for more.

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,” says Jesus. But human reason complains, saying: “Wait a minute, I’m the one who found and decided to follow Jesus.” Yet what are we to do with our Savior’s clear, unambiguous words that **no one** can come to Him unless the Father draws him? The truth is that unless God first draws a person to Christ, there is no way they will ever eat of the Bread of Life, believe in, or follow Jesus. Bringing sinners like us to the Savior is God’s work alone – even as the Scriptures clearly testify – and as we confess in the Catechism in the explanation to the 3rd Article of the Creed: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord – or come to Him – but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” It’s God’s doing – not ours – that draws us to the Savior.

And how does He do that? Again, the Catechism reminds us that we are called by the Gospel. The Holy Spirit calls us through that blessed Word of God which tells us that in Christ we have forgiveness, salvation, and life. Jesus Himself said that those who listen to and learn from the Father are the ones who will come to Him. St. Paul wrote that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.” And he also wrote how he wasn’t ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it’s the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. And as the Augsburg Confession teaches, in order for such faith to be apprehended, the Office of the Holy Ministry was established so that through the message of the Gospel – written, spoken, taught, preached, applied through Baptism, and received in the Supper – God the Father – both initially and forever after – will continue to draw sinners to Christ to be saved.

“No one can come to Me unless the Father ... draws him.” That’s a pretty bold statement. Jesus is saying that your salvation is **solely** and **entirely** the work of God. When you first believed, it was the Father drawing you to Christ by means of the Gospel – even though you undoubtedly felt you were the one doing it. As you

continue believing in Jesus, that’s also the work of the Father through the Holy Spirit – enlightening and sanctifying you through the Gospel. And when the day finally arrives for you to die in that one, true, saving faith, that’s likewise the work of the Father drawing you to Himself through the Person and work of His Son – by the Holy Spirit working through the Word and Sacraments of His Bride, the Church.

That Jesus used the word, “draw,” here in this text is significant, for in Greek this word denotes the pulling in of a dead weight – like what happens if your car runs out of fuel a half mile from the gas station and you have to push it up to the pump by yourself. In the New Testament this word is used when speaking of bringing in a net bursting with fish – or dragging someone before the authorities. Our Savior also used this word of Himself when He said: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will **draw** all people to Myself.” Dear friends, while you were still dead in your trespasses and sins, our good and gracious God mercifully drew you to Christ so that you might believe in Him, partake of Him, and live forever. Even after God creates this Christ-grasping faith, He will continue drawing all who are His to Himself so that none be lost.

God does all this simply because His desire is that you receive His wonderful gifts. He draws you to Christ, the Bread of Life, by teaching you through the Gospel. And just as surely as He draws you – because of His great love – He also wants you to know that because of His drawing you already have eternal life – and that His Son will raise you up on the Last Day. The same God who sustained Elijah for 40 days in the desert on just two meals – who preserved Israel in the wilderness for 40 years with manna and quail – who fed the multitudes with a few loaves of bread and some fish – who came down from heaven and took on human flesh to save us – this One is certainly able to work and sustain faith in you through His life-giving Word spoken in Absolution, attached to the waters of Holy Baptism, united with the bread and wine of Holy Communion, and proclaimed through the preaching of the Gospel. Christ is that Bread which comes down from heaven who has given His flesh for the life of the world – and all who eat of it in faith have God’s unshakeable promise that they will never die, but live with Him forever in His heaven. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds, by faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.