

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



John 6:47-59 *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." ⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.*

We face many dilemmas in this world. Strangely, the comfortable, abundant lifestyle most of us in this country enjoy presents us with more numerous choices probably than ever before in human history—whether it be choices that come in a stroll down a well-stocked grocery store aisle, or with a glance at the full menu of a restaurant. Of course, there are more pressing issues that we have to consider too, such as how to make a living, how to govern our nation, etc.

Mankind is no stranger to dilemmas, in fact, we've become pretty good at solving many of them through observation and applied science (although some of our solutions do tend to create dilemmas in themselves). But man has never been capable of resolving one dilemma—the one dilemma that lies at the heart of all life. That dilemma is this: How do I satisfy my need for true life—that is life in God? And how can I guarantee that I will truly live after death?

In the Word before us today, we have an answer. We'll see, in the words of our theme: that God gives **The Heavenly Solution to Our Earthly Dilemma.**

There are times during the day where you find yourselves hungry, and you likely find yourselves craving a particular food item with which you'd like to curb your hunger. But, if you're like me, the things for which you hunger aren't always necessarily things that will actually nourish you. A candy bar or a soda or a McDonald's cheeseburger might satisfy you for a while, but they don't have much to offer in terms of real nutritional value. What would happen if we always followed our cravings, and our cravings rarely involved those types of foods which would nourish us? That's obvious; our health will suffer. We would starve. And this illustrates mankind's earthly dilemma, which is that sinful man always fails to seek the true bread that truly satisfies.

Today's text is part of a follow-up to the familiar story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. After Jesus fed the crowd, He crossed the Sea of Galilee to the port city of Capernaum. And the crowds who had eaten His miraculously free bread the day before went looking for Him. They figured out that He must have

crossed the Sea, so they went to Capernaum too and found Him there in the streets of the city. They had one goal in mind: more free meals. They wanted to take Jesus and make Him their king, and by the moment in which our text arrives, they were a little put off by Jesus' resistance.

Why hadn't Jesus played along with them? Why did He, the Son of David, slip away from their grasp and this golden opportunity to become their King? After all, he'd taken care of them just the day previous with baskets and baskets of free food? So why not continue to do the same? He was certainly able to do so!

The reason is that Jesus recognized the tendency of sinful mankind to seek to **"live by bread alone,"** (cf. Deuteronomy 8:3) and God had warned that mankind *cannot* live by bread alone. Sinful man's tendency is to think that his primary concern in life should be to keep a full belly and a dry roof over his head. And Jesus met the people in Capernaum that day and told them point blank: **"I say to you, you seek Me...because you ate of the loaves and were filled"** (John 6:26). That's what lay at the heart of the Jews' interest in Jesus. They saw in Him someone to supply their physical needs, to free them up for more pleasant earthly pursuits—they wanted him to be a slave in king's apparel.

The point is that we can't trust our own natural appetites to draw us to the nourishment we really need. In fact, let's test ourselves and the hungers that motivate us: What type of things do we seek most of all? Do we seek a diet of entertainment? Do we labor just to maintain a comfortable standard of living? Are we constantly concerned about security, financial or otherwise? None of those things bring us any closer to God. And what about the things that will bring us closer to God: How great is our natural hunger for that which does feed the soul? Is it easier to turn on the TV, or to spend some time studying the Scriptures? Does your body want to get up and go to church, or snooze the alarm and roll over for another hour of sleep? If you're like me, the answers to all of these questions are very revealing. All too often, we overlook the true nourishment which we desperately need.

The Jews that met Jesus in Capernaum on this occasion were confronted with this issue right at its core: What sort of bread is able to keep you alive forever? Jesus told them: **"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died."** Jesus was referring to those Israelite ancestors who had joined Moses in striking out for the Promised Land after escaping from Egypt. Although they went along for the hike, their hearts were not moved by faith in God's powerful works, and they complained bitterly all the way. One of the things they complained about was **"this worthless bread,"** (Numbers 21:5), as they called it, namely, the delicious Manna that God had miraculously sent them daily from heaven. Miracle bread from God much like the bread Jesus had fed them with the day before, but it didn't last long. Within a forty year period, all of that initial generation of Israelites had died, in spite of that miraculous food. Their death is a constant reminder that all the bread in the world cannot stave off sin nor the divine condemnation that lies behind it. No, we need something else. There's something much more important than just full bellies and homes and financial security that we all desperately need. And the truth is, we cannot acquire it ourselves.

Now, I'm sure most of us would consider ourselves relatively self-sufficient. And by the definition of that term, I guess most of us would be. We are all able to go out and get those things which we need to get by. But if we were to take that idea of self-sufficiency and take it to the extreme, then none of us would self-sufficient. In other words, none of us can just survive on our own without any outside

help. We cannot eat ourselves. We don't have water reserves within us to keep us hydrated. We cannot keep ourselves warm. We all need outside help to keep us alive. This is true of our physical lives, and it's especially true of our spiritual lives.

Jesus says in the verses immediately after our text that ***"The flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."*** (John 6:63) In the first half of that, He's referring to our natural state as humans. He's speaking in the same way as He did in John chapter 3, ***"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of spirit is spirit."*** (v. 6) Our flesh is that which only wants to do those bad things which God tells us not to do, which craves those things. Our flesh is that which wants to avoid the good at every turn. Our flesh profits nothing. Not only do we not seek out that true nourishment from heaven which will sustain our true life, we are totally unable to seek it. We are totally self-INsufficient. We depend on food and water and oxygen and warmth from outside of us to keep us alive, and we are totally dependent on God operating from outside of us to give us true life.

That's the issue that Jesus is addressing through our text. He's speaking with a group of people who are all seeking the wrong things and are unable to seek the right things. So how will they find that which they so desperately need? Jesus' own incarnation—His taking on of human flesh and blood—is God's gracious solution to man's dilemma.

You see, in contrast to the image of the Israelites dying hopelessly in the wilderness, Jesus offered a different sort of food to His audience in Capernaum: He says, ***"I am the Bread of Life."*** He had started out this discourse by speaking to them in the lofty terms of faith: ***"Whoever believes has eternal life."*** But He wasn't getting through to their carnal minds. They were still locked into a "what we really need is a full belly" mode. So, He realized it was time to shock them into looking at things from a different point of view: ***"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."***

This is God's heavenly solution to man's earthly dilemma. God's solution for man is focused right on Jesus. When people look at the Christian religion, they often look at it the same way the Jews looked at Jesus. The Jews thought to themselves, "Hey! This guy can give us all the bread we want!" Similarly today, many people simply think of Christianity as just living a good life and praying to God when they need things from Him—it's all focused on physical life. What Jesus was saying to them and to us all is, "I am the Bread you need."

This is the only bread—the only nourishment for man—that comes with this promise: ***"If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."***

God is interested in supplying us with life. The life He supplies is real, it cannot be hindered, and it cannot fail. When God sent His only begotten Son into this world, that Son had the Father's life in Him—true holiness and blessedness. The Son was intimately united with the Father—they were and are the living God. But the Son came to give life as well, to quicken the walking corpses of people who were lost in sin and spiritually dead to God. There is no other way to have this union with God than through Jesus, His Son: As He says, ***"As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."***

The Jews were a little put off by all of this seemingly gruesome talk. What was this all about? Jesus was pointing to His own physical existence as the key to life—the life of the world. God’s eternal Son *had* lived without a physical body and a human nature. He lived as God. But this same Son became flesh. He became a human being with a body containing roughly two parts water and one part dust of the earth with platelets and hemoglobin coursing through His veins. With a most unnatural beginning, He came into the world in the natural way and with a purpose: ***“God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”*** (Galatians 4:4-5)

This was God’s solution to our earthly dilemma. He would send His own precious Son to atone for our sin and to wipe away the curse that sin brought upon us. And then through His Word He would attach a spiritual feeding tube to us, so that we who are unable to make it on our own, will be fed by Christ.

Jesus came with the full awareness that there was no other means for man to escape the curse of sin other than through Him. He alone would provide the perfect sacrifice. He would make an offering of his body and shed His blood to atone for our sin against God. He would become the sole bridge to perfect peace and reconciliation between God and man. And notice how earnestly He wants to give this free gift away. He’s speaking to a crowd here that is offended at His words. Some are offended because they don’t understand, and it sounds like Jesus is talking about cannibalism. Some are offended because they understand fully what Jesus is claiming—that He is the Son of God from Heaven—and they don’t agree. And yet that does not stop Jesus from inviting them again and again to eat of the food that leads to eternal life. Six times in our text, He repeats the same promise: ***“Whoever believes—whoever eats of My flesh, whoever drinks my blood—will have life everlasting.”***

By His longsuffering mercy, Jesus calls to the Jews to receive Him in faith, inviting them to consume a delectable gift from God, rather than to be consumed by desires that do not satisfy. For He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (cf. 2 Peter 3:9)

The same invitation extends to you and me. Sinners, lost as we would be, totally unable to find our own life—Jesus, comes to give us life, so that we may have it abundantly. He gives us true food in the form of His Word. It’s such a simple solution, but in this Word, God gives life to those who cannot find it. Through the simple reading of His Word, God the Holy Spirit works in hearts to nourish them, and God unlocks heaven’s doors through Spirit worked faith. So pray that God would curb your earthly cravings and help you to hunger for that Word. Notice how in the first half of our text Jesus talks about “eating” His flesh, then He changes to “feeding” on His flesh. That’s because this can’t be just a one-time meal, like, “Oh, I ate that once, I tried that once.” It must be our continual feeding, because it is our continual source of life.

So, may God help us to crave and find this true spiritual food always. After all, where else are we going to find such a nourishing meal? May God grant us a deep appetite for this Bread which truly satisfies. And let us close with prayer: *Blessed Lord, you have caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that by patience and comfort of your Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*