

Midweek Lenten Vespers #4
St. John 6:36-51
March 13th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Bread Which I Will Give

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

My dear friends, just as I preached on Sunday about the connection between the manna sent from Heaven and the bread given to the five thousand, our Lord + Jesus also makes the connection in today’s Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. John. The manna that was sent by the Lord God in the Old Testament sustained the people of Israel for forty years in the wilderness. Our Lord uses this historical event to reveal an even greater spiritual truth. For the manna in the wilderness, the physical bread from heaven, only served to supply the needs and wants of the body. It sated the hunger of those who ate it. The people of Israel did not go physically hungry in the wilderness throughout the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

But our Lord + Jesus tells the people of Capernaum an even greater truth. He presents to them a different kind of bread. This bread if anyone eats of it will never go hungry. He gives them His own flesh to eat. If anyone eat of the flesh of the Lord + Jesus, his *spiritual* hunger is sated. The Bread of Life, which is our Lord + Jesus, does not satisfy the physical hunger of people. It satisfies the spiritual hunger of the soul. We hear these words often in the Exhortation to Communion during the Divine Service. We are exhorted before we receive communion every time that the Sacrament was instituted for the special comfort and strengthening of those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness.” This is the hunger that the Bread of Life, our Lord + Jesus satisfies. He satisfies our hunger to be free from sin and shame.

This eating of the flesh that our Lord + Jesus describes in this sixth chapter of St. John, the Apostle and Evangelist, is only a spiritual eating. He does not intend that His physical flesh be eaten. This is why at the end of this chapter many of His disciples left Him, for this teaching was too hard. St. Peter answered for the twelve when our Lord asked them if they wanted to leave as well. He said that there was no one else to whom they could go. For the Lord + Jesus had the words of eternal life. And

this is really the point that our Lord is making to the people of Capernaum. If someone desires eternal life in heaven, the only way is through the Lord + Jesus. We only have eternal life through our communion with our Lord and Savior + Jesus, the Christ.

For He gives Himself to all those who cling to Him in faith. He gives life and salvation to all those who through faith cling to the offering of Himself. This offering of our Lord is found in His crucifixion and death. He has offered up Himself as a ransom for our sins. He has paid the penalty of sin by His own flesh. He offered up His flesh to be punished and tormented and to be killed. Anyone who eats of this flesh, that is, who clings to this sacrifice of our Lord + Jesus has eternal life. For He has destroyed death and hell's power through His suffering and death. By His death He has opened up for us the way into eternal life. Death and Hell have no power over us, for we cling in faith to this offering up of our Lord's flesh for the sins of the whole world. This sacrifice is the life of the whole world.

But many reject this sacrifice. They reject the suffering of the flesh of the Christ. Even as many of His disciples left Him after this teaching that He teaches us today. Our Lord is directing us poor, miserable sinners to a greater spiritual reality. He is promising to us today that in Him all those who cling to Him in faith have the promise of eternal life. Our hunger and thirst for righteousness is sated by the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior + Jesus, the Christ.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to desire to free from the bonds of sin and death. This is why we come to this altar during the Divine Service to receive our Lord's Body and Blood in bread and wine. We desire to receive the forgiveness of our sins. We desire to receive the righteousness that the Holy Ghost imparts to us through this precious meal. For by the Lord's Supper, we remember and proclaim the Lord's death on our behalf until He comes again on the Last Day to take us from this vale of tears to our eternal home in heaven. This meal that our Lord gives us of His Body and Blood keeps us in the one true faith until we die. It keeps us in the one true faith by continuing to place before our eyes the sacrifice of our Lord's flesh that He gave on the tree of the holy cross. This is the offering of flesh that our Lord + Jesus preaches into our ears today. He is pointing us to His sacrifice for us on the tree of the cross.

This is why this week of Laetare, one of the three rejoicing Sundays in the Church's year, serves as a bridge between the first half of Lent and the latter half of Lent. We go from focusing on the Ten Commandments and our inability to keep them: our constant sinning and shame, to the remedy for that sin and shame, the cross of our dear Lord + Jesus, the Christ. This is why we rejoice this week of Laetare. We rejoice that our sins have been paid for by the suffering and death of our Lord. He endured the punishment that we rightfully deserved on account of our manifold sins and trespasses.

He gives His flesh on behalf of mankind. Therefore, all who eat of this flesh, who cling to His sacrifice in faith, have what He promises they have: an eternal life with Him in Heaven. Our hungering after righteousness is always satisfied in Him and His sacrifice for us. For He gives us righteousness through faith. He justifies us, that is, makes us righteous, through faith in Him. He has the words of eternal life. Eternal life is found in Him alone. Righteousness and freedom from sin and death is found only in Him. Through the sacrifice of His flesh, we have the gift of heaven given to us. He gives this gift to us freely without any merit or worthiness in us. He gives it all to us on account of His love for us. We apprehend this gift through faith in Him.

The people of Israel ate the manna, the bread from heaven, and were satisfied in their hunger. But that bread from heaven could only sustain their physical bodies. They ate the manna, but all of them still died and were buried. Our Lord + Jesus promises us today a different bread from heaven. He promises to give His flesh for the sins of the whole world. He promises to give His flesh on the tree of the holy cross for us poor, miserable sinners. Those who eat of this flesh will never die. Those who cling in faith to the works and merits of the Christ, will never see nor taste death. For He has come down

from heaven for this very purpose. He has come down from heaven to offer us His life as a ransom for ours.

Let us therefore, my dear friends, take this offering of the flesh of the Christ and rejoice that by His flesh sacrificed for us on the tree of the holy cross, we now have the promise of eternal life with Him. We will join with all those who have gone before us in the faith. We will stand in that heavenly band clothed in white robes and carrying palm branches, and we will sing the eternal liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end. We will behold the Lamb of God offered for us and for all the world, as we join with the saints and angels of heaven; with the whole company of heaven. There we will rejoice over our Lord's sacrifice of His flesh for us forever and ever, world without end. Thanks be to God! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!