

Proper 15 – The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. John 6:51-69

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

After putting the topic off, in detail, for the past few weeks, today I will get to the details of the Lord's Supper, as it pertains to our continuing stroll through John 6.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

Feeding on the flesh or body of Jesus and drinking His blood is exactly what is done in the Lord's Supper, "in, with, and under" bread and wine. And it is because of this, and especially verses 54-56, just quoted, that when you hear Jesus call Himself the Bread of Life and Living Bread, and when He says, "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world," your first instinct as a Christian who confess a real presence of Christ in the elements of the Sacrament is to hear Him talking about the Sacrament.

There is a term what what was just done, dear listeners; it's called eisegesis, at least in a general sense; though you could say that this is reading and hearing John 6 exegetically. Eisegesis is to read a meaning into the text or to come at a text with a preconceived bias. It is the opposite of exegesis, which it to interpret what a text is saying. Listening to John 6 alone and hearing the Lord's Supper is eisegetical; to bring other parts of John's Gospel to John 6 (or his other writings), even parts of the other three Gospels, would be true exegesis. Exegesis holds fast to the tenet that Scripture interprets Scripture; therefore, when you come at John 6 with what Jesus says of bread and wine in Matthew, "This is my body...This is my blood," (cf. Matthew 26:26-29), you rightly hear Jesus speaking of the Lord's Supper.

Still, I have to preach about what Jesus is talking about here. Lutheran theologians throughout the ages have noted that this is not an obvious reference to the Lord's Supper: the words of institution are not recorded, no wine is present, Jesus uses the word "flesh" and not "body," and the crowd is generally hostile and unbelieving. Furthermore, these events happen some time before the Supper is instituted, which would make them, at best, proleptic to the Sacrament.

Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus is the Christ is not in question to John's readers, nor to the people to whom Jesus spoke that day in Capernaum. What does it mean to be Christ? It means that He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (cf. John 1:29), that He is the Savior of the World (cf. John 4:42), that He accomplishes the salvation of the world by fulfilling every Lamb-sacrifice from the Old Testament and giving His life as a ransom for many. This, of course, He accomplished on the altar that was the hill called Skull wherein was planted the cross upon which He was nailed and died, giving His flesh and shedding His blood as the propitiation for your sins, and not yours only, but for the sins of the whole world. (cf. 1 John 2:2) So, what you are being pointed back to from these events in John 6 is the incarnation of the Word of God, as St. John previously wrote, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

And, as mentioned last week, this is the point Jesus is making in John 6, that His flesh and blood are given for the sacrifice for the sins of the world. Hostility and unbelief do not effect Jesus' status as the Christ—He is the Savior of all men, and especially of them that believe. (cf. 1 Timothy 4:10) However, feeding on His flesh and drinking His blood is to trust solely in Him and His work for your salvation; it is true food in that it truly saves. Other breads, meats, and drinks, all for which you must work, do not lead to salvation—while they certainly nourish the body, they are not true food that leads to salvation. A father in the faith, St. Augustine, put it this way: "This is then to eat the meat, not that which perisheth, but that which endureth unto eternal life. To what purpose dost thou make ready

teeth and stomach? Believe, and thou hast eaten already.” That last sentence is most especially poignant: “Believe, and thou hast eaten already.”

Now, there is something to guard against here. “Believe, and thou hast eaten already,” St. Augustine wrote, and the temptation is to think that food eaten in faith is not real. This is to assume that faith isn’t real. “Seeing is believing,” the old axiom goes, and, oh, how wrong it is. “[F]aith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote. (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is the substance of things hoped for—a Christian hopes for life everlasting, and this isn’t simply wishful thinking, but sure and certain knowledge that in the flesh-and-blood sacrifice of Jesus the Christ there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Faith is the evidence of things not seen—you do not and cannot see, touch, feel, taste, or in any other way sense that you are saved. In fact, all physical evidence would point to the contrary—oh, how poor and miserable a sinner you are. But, faith knows otherwise. Faith sees the physical evidence, confesses it, pushing it aside, and trusts completely in the flesh and blood of Jesus the Christ for forgiveness and salvation—and this is the height of truth, declared to you by Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (cf. John 14:6) Faith is quite real, no matter how “nonphysical” it is or perceived to be ; therefore, eating of Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood is true as much as they are real food and drink; any Jesus you cannot eat is not the Jesus who preached in Capernaum.

In this way, then, it is said of those Christians of Protestant Reformed persuasions that they also eat of the flesh of Jesus Christ and drink His blood, even though they would deny that His body and blood are truly present in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. By faith, they, too, receive their Lord and Savior, their Redeemer, for the forgiveness of their sins. His flesh-and-blood sacrifice was sufficient and is effective for them—as well as the Papists and Eastern neighbors down the road and around the world—as much as it is for you.

You receive Jesus by faith for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. And here’s how you make the connection to eating His flesh and drinking His blood to the Lord’s Supper, distinguishing Lutherans, Scripturally, from those Protestant Reformed brothers-in-Christ. Rev. Peter Bender wrote, His flesh gives life to the sinful world. His flesh and blood give eternal life with the Father and the resurrection of the body from the dead. Where was His flesh and blood given for the life of the world? Answer: His flesh and blood were offered up in death upon the cross for the forgiveness of sins, and distributed to the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Lord’s Supper that we might receive the ‘forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation’ as our very own

Jesus comes to you for your forgiveness, life, and salvation through means. You ate His flesh and drank His blood as you received Him in the sacrament of Baptism. You eat His flesh and drink His blood as you receive Him in the Word read and proclaimed, in Holy Absolution. Then, most tangibly, you eat His flesh and drink His blood as you receive His body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. When it comes to receiving Jesus and His gift of eternal life, no one way is more important or greater than another—Jesus comes to you in all of them, and He is present—flesh and blood—in all of them mercifully and graciously for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

At the same time, one should not speak of any one of them in exclusion to the others. To this end, Rev. Bender also wrote,

The offering of Jesus’ body and blood upon the cross, the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the Lord’s Supper must not be set in opposition to each other. The Passover was one event, which included the proclamation of God’s word of promise, the shedding of the lamb’s blood, and the reception of God’s deliverance through the

eating of the lamb. Likewise, our salvation is one, which includes the proclamation of the Gospel, the shedding of the Lamb's blood upon the cross, and the reception of God's salvation in the Holy Supper.

All of these means are ways in which Jesus the Christ comes to you. It is wrong for to look to one of them in exclusion to the others. And, yes, this does happen.

For instance, there is the person who would neglect the coming together of the saints, whereat the Word would be proclaimed to them, where they would hear Holy Absolution, and where they could receive the Lord's Supper, all because they feel they meet Jesus well enough worshiping alone on a mountain top, ocean shore, or river bank and by simply studying the Bible. Yes, Jesus does come to that person, but is Jesus there for that person's forgiveness, even as the oneness of salvation is confessed to be that, "which includes the proclamation of the Gospel, the shedding of the Lamb's blood upon the cross, and the reception of God's salvation in the Holy Supper?"

Or, there is the person who perceives that countless Masses spoken on their behalf, whether or not people are present, whether or not they are present, are efficacious to their salvation. So, the Lord's Supper is celebrated, as the Papists understand, even without the reception of the bread and wine, and Jesus is there for the celebrant, but is He present for the celebrant's forgiveness, even as the oneness of salvation is confessed to be that, "which includes the proclamation of the Gospel, the shedding of the Lamb's blood upon the cross, and the reception of God's salvation in the Holy Supper?" Much the same could be said for the one who attends the Divine Service, and could worthily receive the Sacrament, but refuses for whatever reason.

As much as there is a perceived disconnect between faith and reality, one can and does easily disconnect the means of grace from each other. Now, that's not to say that daily devotions and Bible Study avail nothing. There is a certain benefit to celebrating services at which the Lord's Supper is not given and received. There is great benefit to hearing the words of Holy Absolution outside of the Divine Service setting. These all serve you well by placing you in the Word of God, but none of these should be done to the exclusion of any others; on the contrary, they are to be done in conjunction with one another. Yes, hold your devotions and study your Bibles—gather together with others of the family of your household or the household of God to do it—but come also where Jesus is present for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. Yes, enjoy Matins, Vespers, and Compline services, but do not come to these alone, but also come to hear of your sins forgiven as Holy Absolution is spoken over you and receive your Lord's body and blood. Yes, make frequent use of your pastor privately to hear Holy Absolution, but then do not forsake the gathering of saints around Word and Sacrament. These are all part of your Baptismal life and your growth as a Christian.

"[O]ur salvation is one, which includes the proclamation of the Gospel, the shedding of the Lamb's blood upon the cross, and the reception of God's salvation in the Holy Supper." The Son of God took on human flesh and blood, being born of Mary and given the name Jesus, YHWH saves, in order to give His flesh and blood as the sacrifice for sins and be your Savior. He has done this, given His flesh and blood to you, given you faith to receive His flesh and blood. And so it is that you are gathered here: you are Baptized, you have heard of the forgiveness of your sins in Holy Absolution, the Word of God was read to you and is now being proclaimed to you, and you will soon receive the body and blood of the Son of God under the bread and wine. This is the oneness of your salvation. In these means do you really and truly feed upon the flesh of the Son of God and drink His blood. These are the Words of eternal life, and they are yours, and so you are forgiven for all of your sins.

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