

Jesus Is The Bread of Life

**John 6:25-59**

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Pity Jesus the preacher. Jesus offered living water to a woman once, and she got really enthusiastic because she thought it meant indoor plumbing. Jesus offered a new birth to a man in John, Chapter 3, and he thought it meant he had to crawl back inside his elderly mother. Now Jesus tells people they must eat his flesh and drink his blood, and they are grossed out because they think he's endorsing cannibalism. Can you see a pattern here? People are looking for practical, earthy messages, and Jesus wants to talk about eternity and judgment day.

The New York Times Magazine reported a survey on what Americans believe about life after death. Ten percent believe there isn't any. Ten percent believe they come back to earth in a different form. Twenty four percent believe the soul lives on in some other place as determined by past actions. Forty eight percent believe we go to heaven or hell depending on confession of sin and faith in Christ. Eight percent were undecided.

We do not do well with eternity. We would rather talk about family life, the economy, the next election, the war, health care, even global warming. Eternity is not a dinner-table issue. Judgment day is not a particularly marketable religious concept; it never was and never will be. But it is all Jesus wants to talk about in the synagogue that day. He mentions eternal life and judgment day—a.k.a. the "last day"—ten times in this dialog, and the congregation is utterly deaf. He is clear that it is for real, and he is clear that our greatest task in life is to be prepared for it. They listen but do not hear that he is talking about eternity, and so they grumble.

Much of Jesus' words are spent here trying to define his relationship to Judaism. Judaism was centered on Moses, the man called by God. But Jesus is sent directly from heaven, having lived at the Father's side—a fact that is referenced ten times. Jesus is the one who called Moses. Judaism was about the Law, which was like manna: it is our daily bread, but it does not deliver us from death. Jesus is about grace and truth from the next world that gives eternal life. Judaism was about Temple sacrifices that could temporarily atone for sin. Jesus is the one perfect sacrifice that delivers us from all sin. Judaism was

about Israel. Jesus is about the world. The Old Testament was of God, but Jesus represents the arrival of the Perfect and the Eternal. It is like comparing a tent to a mansion. One is temporary and extremely useful, but the other is permanent and superior.

“I am the Bread of Life,” says Jesus (John 6:35). This is an invitation to dinner. But what does it mean?

It means our souls were made for Jesus. Just as our stomachs were designed and created to handle food, our souls were designed to be in a faithful personal relationship to Jesus Christ. If you drank motor oil, your stomach would not be able to handle it, and you would die. If you try to fill your soul with something other than Jesus Christ—even if it is the Law of Moses—you will die. St. Augustine said it best: “Our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee.”

This is an offer to have a direct personal relationship with the living God of the universe. The word “religion” really describes a human endeavor. It is the human endeavor of study, discipline, spiritual techniques, positive thinking, rules, traditions, organization and structure. “Religion” is the highest of all human potential. It can give us the Notre Dame Cathedral, Bach’s music and the inspiration of Habitat for Humanity. But Jesus did not come to spice up an old religion, nor did he come to found a new one. He came to give us one thing: direct personal access to God by believing in the one whom he has sent. Our highest religious achievements cannot save us from sin and death. Jesus can. Do you know him, or are you just religious?

The Bread of Life that Jesus offers is his flesh. This statement points to his sacrificial death on the Cross. We Christians do not believe that Jesus was murdered or martyred. He was sacrificed. Nobody knew this better than Barabbas. Barabbas was the fourth guy in the Pilate’s prison. He was a murderer. Three men would die on Good Friday, and no one could have been more surprised than Barabbas to know he would not be one of them. Jesus took his place. Jesus, the innocent man, died for the guilty. It was a straight substitution. We do not know how Barabbas dealt with this gift. He could have said, “Man, this is my lucky day!” and gone out drinking with his family to celebrate. Or he could have said, “My Lord and My God, since you died for me, I will live for you.” That is what it means to eat the Bread that Jesus offers: it means to believe and receive the sacrifice he has offered for us.

Eating the Bread that Jesus offers you this morning is as simple as A,B,C and D.

**A**-Acknowledge you are a sinner who needs to be saved.

**B**-Believe that the death of Jesus on the cross has taken away your sins.

**C**-Confess publicly that you trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

**D**-Disciple. Resolve to obediently follow Jesus Christ.

Which brings me to Holy Communion. A,B,C, and D are exactly what we act out in our celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Our United Methodist Book of Discipline says this about Holy Communion:

We believe the Lord's Supper is a representation of our redemption, a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ, and as a token of love and union which Christians have with Christ and with one another. Those who rightly, worthily and in faith eat the broken bread and drink the blessed cup partake of the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual manner until he comes.

Taco Bell has a slogan: "Think outside the bun." That is a good way to think about Holy Communion. *Think outside the bread and juice.* Jesus is here, and you can commune directly and personally with him here and now. He can fill your empty soul with the bread of his life so completely that, in the words of St. Paul, it is no longer you who lives but Christ lives in you. (Galatians 2:20)

Author and pastor Rob Bell tells the story of sitting in a restaurant with his family. As they were finishing their meal, the waitress brought the check, then took it away, and then brought it back again. She placed it on the table, smiled, and said: "Somebody in the restaurant paid for your meal. You're all set." And then she walked away.

Bell writes, "I had the strangest feeling sitting there. The feeling was helplessness. There was nothing I could do. It had been taken care of. To insist on paying would have been pointless. All I could do was trust that what she said was actually true and then live in that—which meant getting up and leaving the restaurant. My acceptance of what she said gave me a choice: to live like it was true or to create my own reality in which the bill was not paid."

That is our invitation—to trust that we don't owe anything. To trust that something is already true about us, something has already been done, something has been there all along.

To trust that grace pays the bill. That is what it means to eat the bread Jesus is.