

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – August 12, 2018

### John 6:41-51

41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” 42 They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?” 43 “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. 44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Do you have a lot of bread in your diet? You might have some toast with your breakfast, a sandwich for lunch or a bun or roll with your supper. The list of bread types from around the world is endless, going far beyond our standard of choices of white or wheat or rye or multigrain. Bread types also go beyond just sliced bread and would include flat breads like tortillas and lefse and even pancakes. Whether or not you eat a lot of bread in your diet, it has been a staple of food around the world throughout cultures and throughout time. While the bread that we eat is important because we need food to live, bread is not essential for life. We can live without having to eat a lot of bread. Of course we contrast that with the topic of our gospel lesson, as we continue our look at John 6 and focus on the **Bread that Gives Life**. First we will note its heavenly ingredients and then look at its eternal benefits.

Jesus had announced in the previous verses that he was the bread of life. That news did not sit well with some of his audience. Verses 41 & 42: “At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?” They were not buying his story. They knew his parents, they had known him for thirty years and now he was claiming to be from heaven. Some perhaps thought he was delusional with such claims about being bread that came from heaven. Some perhaps resented him because while they thought he was one of them, now he was claiming to be better than them.

But Jesus knew about their grumbling and told them to stop (v. 43). Answering their response of unbelief Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day” (v. 44). Their conversion would not be their own work, only the Father could draw them to himself. Jesus continued, “It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God’” (v. 45). Isaiah was prophesying of this very time—Jesus as true God was there to teach them. “Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father” (vv. 45-46). Jesus reinforced his heavenly claim. Only he had seen the Father because he was from God and was God.

To be the bread that they needed, Jesus would have to come from heaven. As a simple human being he would not have been able to save himself, let alone save them. Instead they would have to die and spend their eternity in hell. But as true God he could spend those thirty

plus years on this earth living each day without a sinful thought, word or action as a substitute for them. As true God he could go to the cross and pay for all of their sins as a substitute for them. No matter what they thought of Jesus' claim, their only chance at life would come from this bread that came down from heaven.

Unlike those Jews, we are not coming to Jesus from a place of unbelief to grumble against his claims. And yet we still have a sinful nature which daily wants to pull us away and to grumble and complain about how God chose to save us. Wouldn't it just be simpler if Jesus had not come as a lowly man some two thousand years ago and instead was here all the time to do his work? Wouldn't it be better if we had something more than the means of grace in God's Word and sacraments, something more powerful to bring people to faith? Wouldn't it make more sense if we did play some role in our own conversion whether it was based on the good that we do or the choices that we make? With anything it becomes easy to grumble and complain when we think we know better how something should be done. And it is no different when it comes to how God has chosen to save us.

But Jesus' claims are clear. He is the bread that came down from heaven—the only bread that gives life. It is never about us—our sinful nature will always make that impossible. God needs to draw us to himself not only at our conversion but also throughout our lives as he continues to draw us closer to himself. While humanly speaking a book and some water and bread and wine do not seem like much, these means of grace hold the power of God to change hearts and continue to strengthen us in our lives. While Jesus may not be still visibly present among us to teach us, the Bible contains all we need from him so that Isaiah's prophecy still comes true: "They will all be taught by God." When it comes to baking bread, you need the right ingredients. If the recipe is not followed it will not work. When it comes to bread of life the same is true. The only bread that saves came down from heaven as true God and true man to take our place.

Another reason that the audience had for grumbling against Jesus was that he had not given them what they wanted. After his miracle of feeding the five thousand, they had wanted to make Jesus a king, specifically a bread king. They wanted him to keep performing that same miracle so that they could have bread from him every day. They remembered the miraculous daily manna that the Israelites had received through their forty years of wandering in the wilderness and wanted the same for themselves.

But that was not the type of bread that Jesus had come to bring. Jesus continued his response: "I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life" (v. 47). Jesus signaled the importance of what he was saying with that familiar phrase, "I tell you the truth," literally, "Amen, Amen." This bread was not for physical life, but everlasting life. "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die" (vv. 48-50). Even if Jesus had given them physical bread, like the manna of the Israelites, in the end it would do them no good, they would still die. What he was offering would bring life. If anyone was still not clear about what he was talking about Jesus finished: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51). The bread that he was offering, his own life, was more important for their eternal well-being than any physical bread that they were looking for.

Of course we too grumble and complain when we are not getting the bread that we are looking for. Maybe we wish that we had a little more income for that better house or newer car or nice vacation. Maybe we wish that our health issues would go away and that we wouldn't

have to continue in our suffering. Maybe we wish for that perfect relationship where things would just go more smoothly. When our repeated prayers are not answered, we may grumble and complain: God, what's going on here? I've been working hard to do all that you ask, why can't you give me a little more bread right now and make my life easier?

While God may at times grant our requests, he has never promised us a trouble-free life right now—that will never happen while we live with a sinful nature in a world corrupted by sin. Instead he has given us something far better—the bread of life. With this bread we will live forever in heaven, free from all consequences of sin that we grumble and complain about right now. While our sufferings here in this life might at times seem unending, we will have an eternity of lifetimes to spend with our Savior who gave his life for the world. Without this bread that came down from heaven, we would have no hope—the roller coaster of our lives would go up and down only to end in a fiery crash in hell. But with this bread we have that sure hope that when our life ends on this earth, our eternal life is just beginning.

No matter how much bread you have in your daily diet, no matter what types of bread you like to eat, while bread is important for our food intake, physical bread is not what we need most. And so we have the bread that gives life. Jesus came down from heaven to take our place so that someday we can join him in heaven for an eternity. This is the true bread that we need each and every day. Amen.