

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

DON'T GRUMBLE AMONG YOURSELVES

John 6:35, 41-51

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Analysis by Bill White

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

41 Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors 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. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

DIAGNOSIS: Hungry for More than Bread

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Growling Stomachs Lead to Grumbling*

The crowds' reaction to Jesus' teaching is not favorable. Like their ancestors in the wilderness, these Jews begin grumbling ("complain" in v. 41 literally means "were grumbling"). And the subject of their grumbling? Jesus' teaching.

Yesterday, over there on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, when the crowds became hungry they were pleased to have been fed bread by Jesus. Today? Well, it's a new day. And they're hungry again. So now they have tracked Jesus down in Capernaum (6:22-25). Jesus names their physical hunger for what it is; their physical hunger is the real motivation for their seeking him out (6:26). It is as if they are saying, "We're hungry again. How about giving us some more of that free bread?" Jesus responds by teaching them about the true bread from heaven, the food that endures for eternal life (6:27-33) to which they respond, "Sir, give us this bread always" (6:34). Jesus continues teaching that he is the bread of life, the true bread that came down from heaven (v. 35ff), and this leads to their grumbling.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Hungry, But Refusing to Eat*

This grumbling reveals a deeper problem, a deeper hunger. This is the hunger that lies deep within all of us, the hunger for a knowledge of God, the hunger for a word from God. The problem lies in what they believe about Jesus and what they don't believe about Jesus. They do not see Jesus as the true Bread from heaven that will feed their hungering souls. They do not see the bread that Jesus fed them as a sign from God. Rather,

they see the bread that Jesus fed them as nothing more than bread. And besides, they know this guy. He is nobody all that special. Heck, this is just Joseph's kid... (v. 42).

It is as if they are saying, "If we can use him to meet our needs, great! If he can feed us free bread like Moses did, great! But if he thinks he is going to feed us something to believe in other than the Law of Moses he is dead wrong! What? Feed my hunger for a sign from God by believing Jesus' teaching that he is the bread of life that came down from heaven? No thank you!"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Starving to Death*

In spite of their complaining/grumbling (v. 41), Jesus continues to teach the crowd. He reminds them, "Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died" (v. 49). If they continue to try to satisfy their hunger for God by feeding on Moses' kind of bread, they will starve to death. If they reject Jesus, the true bread that came down from heaven, they will starve to death. Keeping the Law of Moses does not grant eternal life.

PROGNOSIS: TRUE BREAD THAT SATISFIES THE DEEPEST HUNGER

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Bread of Life for the World*

John wants us to know that Jesus is the Word of God who gives his life to the world (John, chapter 1). At Golgotha Jesus accomplishes what the law cannot accomplish; he conquers the power of sin, evil and death, and gives life to sinners. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (v. 51). As we will see next week and as John's Gospel further unfolds, Jesus did not

keep the Passover before his death; he was the Passover! Jesus did not eat the Passover meal, Jesus was the Passover meal offering himself on the cross as the life-giving food and drink (vv. 54-55). And the same Jesus who was sent by the Father and gave his life on the cross has been raised by the Father so that all who eat and drink Jesus will live (v. 57).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Hunger Satisfied*

Like the crowds in our text, we too hunger for a word from God. We too, at the deepest level of our being, hunger to know God. Jesus comes to us now, teaching us that the bread for which we hunger is the word of God (vv. 32-50) and reminding us that he is that Word of God. Jesus invites us to be taught by God, to hear and learn from the Father (v. 45). Jesus invites us to take and eat the true bread from heaven, which also means that we believe he is the Word of God who gives his life to the world. "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life" (vv. 47-48).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Growling Stomachs Silenced, Nothing to Grumble About*

Faith in Jesus as the true bread come down from heaven enables us not only to receive and believe Jesus' teaching, but also to appropriate his teachings to our daily lives. Just as we hunger for daily bread to meet our physical needs so also do we hunger daily for the Word of God. And daily Jesus will satisfy our hunger. Daily we may feed on the Bread of Life through prayer. Daily we may feed on the Bread of Life through the reading and studying the sacred scriptures. Daily we may be fed as brothers and sisters in Christ speak the gospel to us. Weekly, this same faith in Jesus believes—as we eat the bread and drink the wine of the Eucharist—that it truly is his flesh and his blood we receive. What joy! What blessing! Nothing to grumble about here! This is Good News: Those feeding on Christ live forever (v. 51)!