

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

WE EAT THE BREAD THAT HAS BEEN RAISED

John 6.51-58

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Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

51 "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."

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever."

DIAGNOSIS: Our Bread Perishes and So Do We

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *We Are Raised to Want More*

The problem is that we don't trust Jesus to be good enough to

take the place of the things we already trust in order to improve our lives, or to make our lives meaningful, or to give us life after death. (A meaningful life and life after death, by the way, are theologically connected: Only life after death makes this life meaningful.) The Pharisees already had their manna from Moses. The crowd that was just fed “ate their fill of the loaves” (v. 26) and wanted more. We want more today and as long as we can have more, we are satisfied with wanting more. We trust that wanting more is to do the works of God (v. 28). This wanting more, this trying harder, this improving our lives, this making things better for our children and our grandchildren, are what we trust as our way to eternal life.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Raised Eyebrows*
For everything we trust, Jesus counters with a better offer by showing that what we trust does not give us eternal life. We want our fill of bread. Jesus says that such bread perishes, but the food that endures for eternal life he will give us (v. 27). We think we have to work, that is, do the works of God (keep the law), for this food that endures to eternal life. But Jesus says that to believe in God and the one whom God has sent is to do the work of God. We have within our reach other great deeds of God—nature, wealth (or at least more money than most of the people in the world), a powerful country, health, escape from accidents that could have been much worse. (We feel better because there is always someone worse off than we are—a very uncompassionate position, by the way.) The Pharisees trusted the events that happened to their ancestors, those people who ate manna in the wilderness (v. 31). Jesus offers himself as the great deed of God, the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (v. 34); everyone who believes Jesus has eternal life (v. 48). Besides, the Pharisees’ ancestors died. We also die, no matter how great God’s grace or deeds are in our lives. But the Pharisees doubted Jesus because they knew his

parents, so he could not have come down from heaven. Now, when Jesus offers his own flesh, his body and blood (his death) as the bread that gives eternal life, we, and the Pharisees, are incredulous. Jesus cannot be trusted. How can his death be our eternal life (v. 52)?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Bread We Make Does Not Rise and Is Thrown Away*

Jesus makes the even more preposterous claim that to not trust him is to not trust God, or, to put it the other way, to trust him is to trust God, his Father (vv. 29, 34, 37, 38, 40, 44, 45, 46, 51, 57). He says that often enough that we cannot miss what he is saying nor can we misinterpret what he is saying. Jesus is from God. He is the bread of life from heaven. But his being from God only makes his claim of giving us his flesh in order to “live forever” (v. 58) all the more impossible, unbelievable. And since we don’t trust Jesus, since we don’t want to eat his flesh or drink his blood (be a part of his death), we have no life in him (v. 53), no life from God. Just like the bread the Pharisees’ ancestors ate, so also the bread we eat, the more we want, the doing the works of the law, only results in this: “they died” (v. 58). This is not simply death. God made them and makes us die. Death is God’s final work that shows us that we do not have life with God. Since God makes us die, we have no hope for resurrection and eternal life, the things that would make our life meaningful.

PROGNOSIS: The Death and Resurrection of Christ Is Our Bread of Life

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *God’s Bread Rises from the Dead!*

Jesus’ flesh is “true food” and his blood “is true drink” because he died and did that for us. Jesus’ flesh is true food and true drink because God raised Jesus from the dead. John

wrote his Gospel knowing that Jesus had risen. That is why John can write that Jesus will raise us up on the last day—we who eat his flesh and drink his blood. By the authority of Jesus' resurrection, (Jesus knowing that it will happen, John knowing that it did happen), Jesus promises that he will raise us up on the last day. By the death and resurrection of Jesus his Father makes him live (v. 57). By Jesus' death and rising, he makes us live. We come to Jesus because the Father draws us to Jesus by raising Jesus from the dead (v. 46).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *We Are Fed the Bread that Is Raised*

Jesus makes us live. He gives us life. He abides in us and we in him (v. 56). No more are we incredulous at his offer of life. He is risen. No more is his promise a difficult teaching (v. 60). He is risen. We have life because Jesus has the new life of his resurrection that he gives to us in his flesh—his body and blood. God gives us the true bread that comes from heaven, his Son, Jesus, crucified and risen. By trusting Jesus now, we do God's work of believing Jesus, and the Father who sent him.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Feed Others the Bread that Is Raised*

In Jesus we have life with God now; we have eternal life with God. We have been given a new meaning in life—Christ himself. We no longer have to work for bread that perishes, but we work to give Christ's life, mercy, forgiveness to others. No more do we slave and worry to do enough of what is right in order to try to obtain a life of meaning, for we have been given meaning and life by Christ. We are free to give life, Christ's life, his mercy, his love, to one another. No more do we have to get more, and more, and more. We have all of heaven, all of eternal life, because God has given us Christ. We are free to give, to serve, to share, to sacrifice, to advocate for those who do not have more but so much less than enough that they starve and die. No

more do we have to earn a living, or make our life meaningful, significant, or amount to something in order to have worth before God. We already amount to the death of Christ. Sure, that's a hard teaching, but it is God's teaching, God's gift that gives life.