

St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, August 12, 2018
John 6:41-51

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'?"

"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 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. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has 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. 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."

Did you have a favorite snack before bed when you were a child? I did. I loved eating cereal before bed and my parents didn't mind. It was lot better than eating chips before bed. One of the things which I liked doing while I was eating the cereal was looking at the nutritional facts on the side where I would learn certain facts about the cereal. Allow me to share some of the nutritional facts with you about these oatmeal squares.

I didn't know a whole lot about these ingredients as a little boy, but reading about them interested me. Now that I'm older, I understand your body needs these ingredients to stay healthy. I also know there are a lot of people who spend a lot of time carefully examining nutritional labels before purchasing or eating something. The reasons are numerous and various. Diabetics need to watch carb intake. Certain people can't eat gluten. Others need to avoid MSG. You can even see calorie counts at McDonald's!

What makes people want to avoid certain foods or count calories? You don't want to get sick or feel terrible all the time or end up way overweight. Ok, that makes sense for physical food, but what about spiritual food? I want us to take the lessons learned from counting calories, examining food labels and nutrition facts and apply them to the bread of life while we study Jesus the life giving bread. We can note the heavenly ingredients used and enjoy the eternal benefits he gives.

Our gospel lesson continues with the ongoing discussion about the bread of life. **“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?’ ‘Stop grumbling among yourselves,’ Jesus answered. ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.’”**

“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. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.” Last week began our discussion about the fact Jesus is the bread of life. We heard Jesus call himself the bread which gets rid of all hunger and he calls himself the drink which completely quenches all thirst.

The opening verses of our lesson this morning shows us the way the Jews reacted to Jesus' words. They didn't like them which led them to grumble about Jesus. What was their main complaint about Jesus' words? Their main complaint was the fact they thought they knew who he was. They knew his mom and dad. They had seen him grow up. They figured there was no possible way which the things Jesus was saying about himself were true.

Jesus, however, is having none of their complaints about his words. He instructs them to stop grumbling about them and he counters them by describing the heavenly ingredients which are involved included in the bread of life. **“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. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.”**

Did you notice the nutritional facts and ingredients Jesus listed in the bread of life? He said the bread of life comes from heaven. What makes it important the bread of life comes from heaven? Jesus quotes

the prophet Isaiah to share what makes it important. **“It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’”** The reason God sent the bread of life from heaven is to reassure us we are receiving pure bread for our souls because God himself is teaching us.

Jesus stresses this important benefit when he says, **“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.”** Jesus promises us one of the health benefits which the bread of life gives us is that it allows us to listen directly to God. We don’t have to wonder or guess what God is thinking, because the bread of life directly reveals what God is thinking to us.

The fact God sent Jesus (the bread of life) to become human is incredible. God himself became man. Fully God and fully man in one person. It boggles the mind and is far beyond human capacity to understand the full mystery of the bread of life. Yet, sadly, the sinful mind isn’t satisfied to let Jesus words stand on their own. It likes to grumble and complain about them when they don’t make sense. Or even worse it is willing to dismiss them altogether when it can’t comprehend God’s truth.

You can picture it this way. Imagine you’re in the grocery aisle looking at a loaf of bread. You recognize some of the ingredients: flour, wheat, sugar and others. Yet, when you look closer at the loaf of bread there are some things in it you don’t expect such as sodium citric acetate and triple reinforced riboflavin. You’re shocked when you see these things. They shouldn’t be in there. This bread must be no good and you toss it aside because you’ve passed judgment on some of the ingredients.

Now, apply this to the bread of life. You look at some of the ingredients: love, caring, selfless, teacher, great example and so on. Alright, you can understand those things. They make sense, but you keep studying the bread of life. Born of a virgin. Sent directly from heaven. Fully God and fully human. Rose from the dead. Does any of this make sense? How could anyone be born of a virgin? How could anyone rise from the dead? What does the sinful mind do? It tosses it aside because it doesn’t make sense.

Do you see the danger which this attitude brings? Suddenly, God no longer is God. I am god. I get to sit in judgment and decide what is right and wrong. I get to accept or reject what Jesus is saying. I am the one who decides what ingredients are good for me and which ones are bad. I judge the bread of life. Where is the danger in judging the bread of life? The danger is we are rejecting God’s chosen method to communicate with us and thereby putting ourselves at risk of missing out on the eternal benefits.

“I tell you the truth, he who believes has 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. 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.” Jesus makes some pretty strong promises with these words, doesn’t he?

He promises us the bread which came down from heaven enables and allows people to live forever. He promises those who eat from it will live forever. This bread from heaven stands in stark contrast to the manna which the Israelites ate in the desert. The people who ate the manna in the desert died, but

Jesus promises the people who eat from the bread of life will live forever. The bread of life grants those who eat from it strong benefits because they last forever.

How is the bread of life able to grant benefits which last forever? **“This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”** Jesus says the bread of life is able to grant these benefits because it will be offered up on behalf of the world. Jesus is referring to his death on the cross with these words. The bread of life is able to grant eternal benefits because Jesus died on the cross. Jesus’ death forgives sins. Yes, even the sins of judging, complaining and grumbling about the bread of life.

Nothing about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection makes sense from a human perspective. God becoming man by being born of a virgin. A completely innocent man suffering for the guilty. A man rising from the dead after dying on a cross. It doesn’t make any sense. How can anyone believe it? **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”** God is the one who enables us to believe and receive the eternal benefits which Jesus’ death and resurrection brings.

God brings us to faith by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. His plan of salvation doesn’t make sense to us, but the Holy Spirit is stronger and more powerful than human reason. He is the one who convicts us of our sins, but more importantly he is the one who empowers us to trust Jesus’ death has forgiven all our sins. The Holy Spirit is the one who fills us with peace and joy when we feast on the bread of life.

I know there are going to be things which we can’t understand about God. How is it possible for someone to be fully God and fully man in the same person? How is it possible hearing and listening to promises made by someone will enable us to live forever? Will we really rise from the dead on the last day? We will never be able to find answers which truly satisfy our curiosity, but just because we don’t understand something doesn’t mean it is false. It means we need to trust the bread of life.

I don’t know whether or not you have a favorite bed time snack. I no longer eat cereal before bed, but now I actually understand the reason why those ingredients are listed on the side of the box even though I don’t look at them very much anymore. However, I pay much greater attention to the ingredients involved in the bread of life because those heavenly ingredients offer some pretty awesome benefits. May God continue to enrich our lives with these benefits today and always. Amen.