

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
August 18, 2024  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
The Bread That Gives Wisdom and Life  
John 6:24-51 (EHV)

*I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”* <sup>52</sup>*At that, the Jews argued among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”*

<sup>53</sup>*So Jesus said to them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. <sup>54</sup>The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. <sup>55</sup>For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. <sup>56</sup>The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup>Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like your fathers ate and died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.”* <sup>59</sup>*He said these things while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. <sup>60</sup>When they heard it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching! Who can listen to it?”*

<sup>61</sup>*But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, “Does this cause you to stumble in your faith? <sup>62</sup>What if you would see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup>The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh does not help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. <sup>64</sup>But there are some of you who do not believe.”* For Jesus knew from the beginning those who would not believe and the one who would betray him. <sup>65</sup>*He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me, unless it is given to him by my Father.”*

<sup>66</sup>*After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week, we listened to Jesus tell us that the Father drew us to faith in Christ. All credit and all glory for our salvation and for our faith is given to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. With our gracious God doing everything, it sounds easy to be a Christian. So why doesn't Jesus make it easy to continue to be a Christian? Believing in Christ leads us to some difficult things in life.

A believer will gather with other believers regularly. We gather on Sunday mornings. That means that you won't be gone every weekend. You might have to tell a friend you will fish or golf or whatever else on Sunday afternoon but not on Sunday morning. You might have to say no to a children's activity that meets on Sunday mornings. Saying no good, fun activities for ourselves and especially for our children is not easy.

Believers also say no to sinful activities and flee from situations that would lead me into sin. No, I'm not getting drunk with my friends. No, I'm not joining in that conversation that glorifies and jokes about immorality. No, I'm not going to gossip about my spouse or boss or teacher or friend with the group. And if a friend is regularly putting me in tempting situations, I might have to say no to being around that friend. Saying no to sin and to those tempting me to sin is not easy.

And then Jesus talks about my money. God loves a cheerful giver. God encourages us to give generously to support the ministry of the gospel and to be generous towards others in our lives. Being generous means I have to say no to some of the things I want to do with my money. I can't

get what I want, at least not as soon as I want, when I give generously to the church and to others. Giving generously when I'm young might delay my retirement goals. I might have to say no to a vacation or a children's activity or that new technology if I give generous first fruit offerings. Saying no to ourselves in financial matters is not easy.

As difficult as it is to align our time, life, and money with God by saying no to other things, I think there is something even more difficult about being a Christian. Jesus asks us to believe some things that don't line up with what we can see and what our mind perceives. We know and believe the basics. Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. We get it that Jesus is our Savior who takes away the sin of the world. But then Jesus goes and tells the people that he came down from heaven. He is standing in front of them with flesh and blood just like the crowd. How can he be from heaven? How can he be God's Son?

Then he tells them that he will give his flesh to give life to the world. He even says:

*Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. <sup>54</sup>The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. <sup>55</sup>For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. <sup>56</sup>The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup>Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like your fathers ate and died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.*

That is not easy to understand. Many of us probably start thinking about Holy Communion when Jesus says such things. Hold onto that thought for later. For now, Jesus is not talking about Holy Communion. He won't institute that until much later. He uses the word flesh here and will use the word body then. He gives the disciples bread and wine to eat and drink when he says, "This is my body...this is my blood." He doesn't give the crowd here anything to eat or drink when he tells them to eat his flesh and drink his blood. So, if he is not talking about Communion, what is he talking about?

The context always helps. We've heard Jesus give the main theme of his Bread of Life discourse the last two Sundays. Listen to a few of the verses again:

*This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent. (6:29)*

*For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the Last Day. (6:40)*

*Amen, Amen, I tell you: The one who believes in me has eternal life. (6:40)*

To receive eternal life, believe in Christ. To receive eternal life, eat his flesh and drink his blood. You eat bread to have earthly life. You eat the Bread of Life to have eternal life. Eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood is therefore a vivid way of saying to believe in him. In this vivid way, Jesus is telling those who follow him that we are to believe him about everything and believe him all the time. Jesus does not give us the option of picking and choosing what to believe. You consume all of the Bread of Life, not just part.

Christ calls on us to submit our hearts and our minds and our wills to him and believe whatever he says. And remember that Christ speaks many words, in fact Christ speaks all the words from Genesis to Revelation. Our hearts and minds and wills in the fallen state of sin always have an objection. In Genesis 1, the Lord tells us how he created everything in six twenty-four hour days. But the rocks people dig up are said to tell a different story. In Genesis 2, God establishes marriage as one man and one woman united for life. But God surely wouldn't mind if I got a divorce since I found someone else who makes me happy. In Genesis 3, a serpent talks to the woman. But snakes don't talk. We don't have time to go through every chapter of the Bible this

morning, but our sinful hearts, minds and wills could object to some part of almost everything Christ says. We are still falling for the temptation in Genesis 3 that we can be like God, that our wisdom can match his.

Sometimes people having these objections, do what many in the crowds did in John 6: *After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore.*

Submitting one's heart, mind, and will (in addition to our time, money, and behavior) to Jesus is not an easy path to walk through life. Many simply walk away. Jesus weeps when he looks over Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week. He mourns the loss of souls who have chosen to walk their own way instead of being ruled by Christ through faith. So, we too mourn when someone walks away from the congregation and/or walks away from Christ completely. As we discussed last week, we pray for them and pray that God would use us to reach out with the grace of God that can draw them back to faith.

Of course, this is also a warning for all of us here this morning to not walk away. Jesus uses the departure of some of his followers to challenge the twelve.

*<sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the Twelve, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."*

There is no one else who paid for all sin, except Jesus. There is no one else who will raise us to life on the last day, except Jesus. There is no one who opens heaven for sinners by dying for us, except Jesus. There is no one who raised himself from the dead, except Jesus. There is no one who takes bread and wine and gives it to us saying, "Take and eat, this is my body...drink from it all of you, this is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins", except Jesus. You could have a nice life without Jesus. But to whom will we go for the forgiveness of sins. To whom will we go for eternal life? The Bread of Life is the only option. Therefore, we gladly submit ourselves in everything to the One who gave himself for us. He has the words of eternal life.

Amen.