

JOHN 6:51–69. (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.” At that, the Jews argued among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 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. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 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. 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.” He said these things while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. When they heard it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching! Who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, “Does this cause you to stumble in your faith? What if you would see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 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. 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. He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is given to him by my Father.” After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore. So Jesus asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Have you ever had real bread? I’m not talking about the stuff you can buy in the bread aisle of the grocery stores, which might have a lot of good ingredients, but also has a lot of preservatives because it isn’t fresh. I’m talking about real, fresh, homemade bread made from scratch with simple ingredients. Maybe you lightly toast it and melt some butter on it, or maybe you just cut a thick slice and bite into it fresh. There’s nothing like real bread.

Today Jesus tells us that he is the real bread, even more real than a homemade roll or loaf fresh out of the oven. He tells us that he is the real bread, and then he tells us how to know the real bread, the real him, the real Jesus.

Over the last few weeks, the Gospel has been from Jesus’s Bread of Life discourse in John Chapter 6. Jesus began by saying that he would give them food that endures to eternal life. Then he told them that the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Then he clearly stated, “I am the Bread of Life.” He also clearly states that in today’s Gospel: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.”

Jesus also made it clear how to eat him as the Bread of Life. “This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent.” “The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.” “This is the will of my Father: that everyone who

sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life.” “Amen, Amen, I tell you: The one who believes in me has eternal life.” We eat the Bread of Life by believing in Jesus as the Bread of Life, as the one who gives what no earthly food can give—eternal life.

But now Jesus really doubles down on this idea of himself as the Bread of Life. First, he doubles down by making it clear that he is the *only* such Bread of Life: “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.” There are some who might be willing to say that Jesus gives eternal life, but not that Jesus is the only one who gives eternal life. But that is what Jesus says.

And as you just heard, Jesus also doubles down on himself as the Bread of Life by taking his metaphor even farther. He told his audience, “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” And when they asked the seemingly rational question, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”, Jesus didn’t respond by saying, “You silly people, I’m not talking about you literally tearing into my flesh with your teeth. I’m talking about believing in me!” No, he said, “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. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. . . . 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.”

Instead of clearing up the offense they are taking at Jesus’s words, Jesus makes his words even more offensive to them. “To eat me as the Bread of Life, you can’t just eat my flesh; you must also drink my blood! And unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you do not have life in yourselves.”

What is Jesus doing? First of all, Jesus is exposing their stubbornness and their failure to listen. Jesus had told them that they were stuck on trying to obtain food that spoils. And that’s still what they’re trying to do, even though Jesus has made it clear to them he is something much better than that. When he tells them the bread he has for them is his flesh, they can’t imagine any other way Jesus could give them his flesh except for them to tear it off of them with their teeth. They can think of no other eating besides physical eating. Jesus had also talked about them feeding on him by believing in him multiple times, but it keeps going right over their heads.

For those who only hear what they want to hear, for those who don’t truly listen to Jesus, Jesus isn’t interested in giving simple, clear explanations. That’s the same reason he often expressed his teachings in parables, so that only those who were serious about their spiritual life, serious about the truth, and seriously listened to Jesus would find the truth and understand what he was saying. Everyone else would see, but not perceive, hear but not understand.

But the other thing Jesus is doing is letting his audience know who the real Jesus is. He has already made it clear that he is the real bread, and he makes it clear again here. But who is the real he, the real Jesus? When Jesus says that we must believe in him in order to have life, what does he mean by that? What do we need to believe about him?

Back in 2017, a Lutheran pastor in North Dakota published a book titled *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* I thought I maybe heard that Pastor Harley even went through that book in a Bible study here. The author talks about twelve false Jesuses that people commonly worship.

There is Jesus the Mascot, who never judges us and supports all the decisions we make that make us feel happy. There is Jesus the Therapist, who exists to take us to the next level and to help us be the best versions of ourselves. There is Jesus the Giver of Bling, who exists to give health, wealth, and success to those who really believe in him. There is Jesus the National Patriot, Jesus the Social Justice Warrior, Jesus the Mystical Friend, Jesus the Teddy Bear, and others.

But Jesus tells us here who he really is. He tells us who it is we really need to feed on. We need to eat his flesh and drink his blood. We might initially think of the Lord's Supper, and for many years part of this Gospel was the Gospel for the Corpus Christi festival, when the consecrated host was paraded around for the faithful to adore. But that's not what Jesus is primarily talking about here. He hadn't even instituted the Lord's Supper yet, and wouldn't for some time.

He's telling us that we're not really eating him if we do not have his flesh that he gave into death for our life and his blood that he poured out for our sins, as true man and true God who came down from heaven, at the heart and core of our faith in him. He is the Crucified. He is the God whose human flesh was spit upon, slapped, and punched, the God whose human flesh was flogged and torn to shreds, the God whose human flesh was pierced with thorns and nails, the God whose human blood flowed freely from his wounds to the point of death for our sins. He is the one who took the punishment we deserved for our sins upon himself. He is not our mascot, therapist, or giver of bling. He is not our national patriot, social justice warrior, mystical friend, or teddy bear. He is our substitute and Savior from sin, death, and hell. He is the only substitute and Savior who promises and gives eternal life.

Is this a hard teaching? That's what many of Jesus's own disciples said. The crowds who thronged around him the day before when he miraculously fed them with five loaves of bread and two fish, the crowds that thronged around him at the beginning of this day, kept dwindling and dwindling as Jesus kept preaching. It is a hard teaching to our sinful nature, to our natural human reason. "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is given to him by my Father." Only God the Father, working through his Spirit, can convince us that we're not basically good people who just need a little help from Jesus, but condemned, hellhound sinners who need to be saved by Jesus.

But when he does convince us of that? "So Jesus asked the Twelve, 'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'"

If you don't want the real bread, the real Jesus, where else are you going to get the bread Jesus gives? Where else can you feed your soul the way Jesus does? Where else can you hear the message Jesus preaches? Where else can you have your sins washed away in a baptism like his? Where else can you receive the peace of forgiveness in a supper like his? Where else can you find the peace with God, the certainty in the face of misfortune and death, the deliverance from hell, the love for the truth, the motivation and strength to do what is right that Jesus gives in his word and in his sacraments, which are joined with his word? Good luck.

There may be things about Jesus's teaching that make us uncomfortable and struggle and stumble in our faith from time to time, but when our hearts stop feeding on Jesus's flesh and blood, we lose what only this real bread, this real Jesus, can give. Where else can we go? Only

Jesus has the words of eternal life. He alone is the real bread. All those who eat his flesh and drink his blood in faith will live forever. Amen.