

First Trinity Lutheran Church
August 19, 2012
John 6: 51-58

Dinner is Ready

One Sunday morning, a pastor was searching his closet for his a special shirt that he wanted to wear when he found a small box containing 6 eggs and a hundred one dollar bills. He called his wife into the closet to ask her about the box and its contents. Embarrassed, she admitted having hidden the box for the entire 30 years of his ministry. Disappointed and hurt, the pastor asked her, "Why?" The wife replied that she didn't want to hurt his feelings. He asked her how the box could have hurt his feelings. She said that every time he had delivered a poor sermon, she had placed an egg in the box. The pastor felt that 6 poor sermons in 30 years was certainly nothing to feel bad about, so he asked her what the one hundred one dollar bills were for. She replied, "Each time I got a dozen eggs, I sold them to the neighbors for a dollar!"

In defense of the Pastor, I must say that sometimes God's word is not received well. We might hear things that we do not want to hear and so God's word is sometimes uncomfortable, too demanding or simply does not make sense. To the Corinthian Church the apostle Paul once said "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God".

The Jews who listened to Jesus that day, his message was foolishness. It just didn't sit well with them when Jesus told them to eat his flesh and drink his blood! Earlier on in the chapter when Jesus suggested that he was the bread of life, they began to murmur and complain. Matters got worse when Jesus said "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you". Their murmuring has now

gradually escalated into quarreling among themselves. They are confused and angry at what they have heard.

Jesus likened his body to bread. He spoke of himself as the bread from heaven but the only bread from heaven that the people were familiar with was “manna”. “Manna” fell from heaven in the form of little flakes and was a substitute for bread. While in the wilderness, God satisfied their physical hunger with this heavenly food. But, even though manna was food from heaven and in that sense holy, it only filled their stomachs. It supported earthly life but did not take away death. But for those in a spiritual wilderness, Jesus offers bread, which is his body. This food is not for the body but for the soul. It is the “real food” that Jesus spoke about and one that supports everlasting life. “Your fathers ate manna and are dead” Jesus said, “but I am the living bread andwhoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life... My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink”.

The people never fully understood and took Jesus’ words literally in terms of eating his flesh and blood. Quite frankly it is hard for us to understand as well. John 1:14 tells us that the “word” became flesh and dwelt among us. Therefore, when we feed on God’s word, in a sense we are also feeding on his flesh.

Jesus also likened his blood to “real drink”. The Jewish people had a hard time dealing with blood. For centuries they sacrificed animals but God commanded that they do not drink any of the blood (Lev.17:10cf). On the one hand they knew blood was a means of atonement for their sin but on the other, they were forbidden to drink any form of it because it represented life.

Maybe there are some of you here today who are struggling with this issue of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood. You come in faith to the Lord's Table to eat bread and wine but the idea of eating His body and drinking His blood is a hard saying - and surely it is if taken literally. But if we understand this in a spiritual sense, it is a simple truth.

Oftentimes we commingle physical life with spiritual life, and when we do that, Jesus' words would be hard to understand. We must remember that Jesus was talking about spiritual life. The spiritual eating and drinking of Jesus' body and blood is a partaking of his life and values. Just as the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, so too are we in the Son and the Son in us when we eat his body and blood.

A few years ago pollster George Barna conducted a national survey asking simply, "What is the phrase you most long to hear?" The overwhelming answer was rather predictable: "I love you." In a solid second place was "I forgive you," also not surprising. But the third most longed-for phrase took me a bit by surprise: "Dinner is ready!" Come to think of it, though, Jesus, especially in John's Gospel, didn't need Barna's research to address our deepest longings: love, forgiveness, and sustenance. In fact, for four Sundays in a row now our lectionary has hovered in this 6th chapter of John where we've heard Jesus repeatedly claim, "I am the Bread of Life." Dinner is ready alright, and he is both host and menu!

Jesus is the Host of the Supper and Lord of the table – it is he who gathers us together to feed on Himself. His calls us the words “Dinner is ready.”

At the communion table when the bread and wine is consecrated and blessed, it is no longer the bread baked in someone's home or wine purchased in a store. The Spirit

of God descends upon and enters these sacraments and it becomes holy and life giving. When you and I then partake in faith, we are not just eating bread and drinking wine but rather we are taking into ourselves the body and blood of Jesus.

To the believer, the body of Jesus is “real food” and his blood is “real drink”. As you and I continue to feed on Him spiritually, our lives will gradually be transformed and we will reach a point when it is no more that we live but Christ who lives in us. Come Dinner is ready! Amen.