

For the Life of the World

John 6:41-71

I. Introduction

We are consumers especially in the west. That's what we do. We consume. In 2016, the band named Moby recorded a song called, *Are you Lost in the World Like Me?* The song laments the lost-ness of our world as we unreflectively consume. The song video, which is animated in black and white, portrays a wide-eyed child roaming through a world full of people who do nothing but consume, staring at their smartphones. Bent over and enslaved to their screens, they plunge down manholes and off of cliffs. They even take pictures of a baby without noticing that the baby crawling away from everyone. The lyrics critiques our obsession with mindless consumption, especially of technology. But the song applies across the board to our cultural fascination with and restlessness from continuous consumption. And, the fact is: One is what one consumes. The negative maxim is: "Garbage in, garbage out." The positive maxim might be: "Value in, value out." So, what did you spend time consuming this week?

Let's pray: Father, thank you for these words. As we open your book, we invite your Spirit here to enlighten the eyes of our hearts that our faith may be fortified and our hope revived. In Jesus name, Amen.

Context

This is our third week in John chapter 6. Chapter 6 began with the feeding of the 5,000 during the feast of Passover. These feasts in the Jewish world were a time to remember and renew, remember what God had done in the past and renew hope for what God would do in the future. All the themes and symbols surrounding a particular feast would be on the forefront of everyone's minds.

With the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus explodes the myth of scarcity, teaching us that God is a God of abundance. Jesus then teaches a sermon on the deeper meaning behind this miracle, especially as it relates to him. This sermon is the Bread of Life sermon. Last week we looked at the first part of the sermon where Jesus first declares that he is the bread of life, what we just read for our Scripture Reading. We learned that he is the ultimate satisfaction for our souls. Nothing else will satisfy us as he says, "*whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst*" (John 6:35). The point is he alone meets our deepest needs.

In our text today, Jesus finishes this famous sermon. So, I now invite you into the text, John chapter 6, beginning at verse 41.

II. The Hostile Opponents (41-51)

41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws

him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me — 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." (ESV)

A. The "Jews"

We are now midway through this tense debate. What is interesting is that John moves from calling the people gathered there "the crowd" to now "the Jews." Typically when John uses this term, he is referring to the Jewish authorities who actively oppose Jesus. In this case, it appears that some hostile Jewish leaders step out from the crowd and become more vocal in their rejection of Jesus.

They grumble – grumble – grumble. They grumble because of where Jesus says he's from. They turn to each other and say, "What is he talking about? Come on, how can anyone come down from heaven? We know this man! He's from just down the road in Nazareth. His parents are Joseph and Mary. He's merely a carpenter!"

It's the same kind of grumbling we hear today. Jesus was merely a man. He was a good man with good moral teaching, but nothing more. He's no different from any other religious guru. But, as C.S. Lewis has said, and we quoted a few weeks ago, "The idea of a great moral teacher saying what [Jesus] said is out of the question... The only person who can say these sorts of things is either God, [a liar] or a complete lunatic" (Lewis, 158).

So, these religious leaders grumble, and Jesus commands them to stop grumbling.

B. The Grumbling

Of course, hearing the word "grumble" reminds us of the Israelites of old during their wilderness wanderings. The Jews had suffered in slavery in Egypt for 400 years. God then miraculously used Moses to lead them out of slavery and to freedom. God powerfully parted the Red Sea so the people could "pass over" to the other side and escape Pharaoh's armies. Now, they were truly free. But, they are now in the wilderness, and must depend on God to provide for them. That's when they begin grumbling. Exodus 16, one of the key passages read during this feast, says this:

2 And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, 3 and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

God had just provided the most remarkable experience in history, and the people grumble. Not only do they grumble, they think they were better off back in the control and comfort of slavery

than in the hands of the living God. Yet, God, in his grace and mercy, hears their cry and provides manna and quail for them. And, if you would continue to read the story, you'll recognize that this was a continual problem for God's people. Grumble –grumble - grumble.

And, I think Jesus here commands this group to stop grumbling as a warning to them that they are in danger of following in their ancestor's footsteps. But, the difference now is that the true bread from heaven is here, and the consequences of rejection are much greater.

C. Our Grumbling

Grumbling. I am so glad Thanksgiving is this week. In a year like 2020, I certainly can use some focus on giving thanks. I know for me, I have found myself grumbling a lot this year. And, I kind of laugh it off and think it's not a big deal. And, yet, grumbling *is* a huge deal for the people of God. Grumbling is a great danger for the church, arguably worse than gossip, arguably worse than outright conflict. From a faith standpoint, grumbling is very dangerous. Why? Because grumbling is actually the first sign of rejection of God. Grumbling is the first sign of unbelief. Grumbling is the first step toward idolatry. When we grumble, we are placing ourselves at the center of life, so grumbling is navel-gazing. True Christian discipleship is Christ-gazing. Grumbling is proof positive that we are not walking in step with the Spirit, and spells huge trouble for any church. Grumble – grumble – grumble.

Paul outlines this plainly in Romans 1. Our men's groups just studied this passage. The end of Romans 1 is that rather depressing passage where Paul explains in detail humanity's descent into idolatry. And, what is the first step for Paul? The first step is not giving thanks! Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. Paul says this, *"Even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks"* (Rom 1:21). Do I ever need to hear that in my own life! Paul then goes onto list all the different ways humanity falls into idolatry. And, the first step is grumble, grumble, grumble. May the Lord teach us, as Paul says elsewhere, to be *"thankful in all circumstances,"* so as not to grumble – grumble – grumble but to glory – glory – glory (1 Thess 5:18).

D. Drawn by the Father

Jesus continues. You can only come and see if the Father draws you. In other words, God does the drawing, like he did with Abraham, like he did with Israel. Jesus quotes Isaiah saying, *"All will be taught by God"* (Isa 54:13). In Isaiah, this quote alludes to a future restoration of the people of God where intimacy with God will be reestablished. Jesus uses it here to explain that God must move a person's heart before he or she can see his work. God must teach all.

Many of us have had this experience. It may have happened slowly or suddenly. It may have happened painfully or not as painfully. However it happened, we know that we've been drawn to Jesus. It's nothing we've done. In other words, it's all gift, and we give thanks. Glory – glory – glory.

Ultimately, the point Jesus is making here is if you have been drawn and taught by the Father, you are actually listening and learning from Jesus. The God who teaches all is being revealed by Jesus. Jesus is making God known at this moment (John 1:18).

E. The Bread of Life

Jesus goes on. He repeats that he is the bread of life. If anyone eats this bread, they will not die. Indeed, life for the world is at the very heart of Jesus claim.

Two other texts read during Passover were Genesis 2 and 3. In Genesis 2, God instructs Adam and Eve that they *“are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen 2:16-17)*. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *means* living independently from God. It is to be your own God and determine for yourself what is good and what is evil. If Adam and Eve eat of that tree, they will die. Genesis 3 says that Eve took and ate and gave some to her husband. And, they died, and so do all of their children. The whole human race dies. Eat of it and you will die.

Jesus comes along and says, *“This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may ... eat of it and not die.”* Eat of this, and you will not die. To eat of this bread, the bread of life, is to enter into the life we lost at the fall. To eat of the bread of life is to eat and not die. To eat of the bread of life is to live forever! The great enemy, that thing we fear the most, death, is now surmountable through the bread of life!

Jesus continues and gets even more provocative, verse 51b.

III. The Flesh and Blood (51b-59)

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, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” 59 Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. (ESV)

A. Let’s eat!

Of course Jesus would finally get to eating. This text began with a large crowd eating bread and fish. But, that was just an appetizer. Jesus then claimed to be the bread of life. Now, we finally get to eating. And, not only us, but the entire world.

B. The Crucifixion

Jesus gets graphic, talking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. And, it is shocking language. This of course looks forward to his crucifixion, for it is there where he will give his flesh and blood, his very self, for the life of the world. He is *“the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* through his sacrifice on the cross (John 1:29).

The Jews, in response, turn from grumbling to arguing over the shocking language. I am a bit sympathetic to their confusion. At face value, this is bizarre language. But, their response once again evokes memories of the actions of their ancestors. In Exodus 17, the Israelites argued with Moses putting God to the test. In the same way, these Jews are putting Jesus to the test. But, Jesus' language moves way beyond Passover language.

These leaders seem to think about cannibalism which is completely gross. Jesus is obviously not talking about cannibalism here. Jesus is speaking provocatively to get their attention and to get our attention. He's wanting them and us to understand what "keep coming to him and keep believing in him" really looks like. We must feed on him. It is his bold way of saying that faith in him is more than an intellectual assent to the truth of who he is. Faith in him is not simply a theological proposition, a subject over which to debate. True faith is entering into an intimate relationship with him, so intimate, he can say eat me. Eating and drinking are Jesus' symbolic ways of saying, "I want you to share intimately in my very life. In fact, ingest me into your life so that my life becomes your life. I give myself to you. Feed on me and nourish your life with my life so that we may abide together forever. Be at home with my Father and me, fellowship with me, commune with me, participate with me, remain in me as I remain in you. Let's share life together, not just during communion, but always and forever. *Taste and see that I am good*" (Ps 34:8).

C. Communion

This sharing of life happens all the time through the Spirit but this text particularly points forward to the act of communion. John does not record the words of institution at the Last Supper in his Gospel. It could be that this is his words of institution. When we planned this service, I told James that we simply had to do communion today. And, thanks to Bunnie for helping our kids learn the importance of communion this morning. Our children must be appropriately included into our faith rituals so they know the faith.

D. Communion Tradition

Some traditions take our text today in a literal sense such that they believe the bread and juice of communion actually become the physical body and blood of Jesus. Most Protestant churches do not take it this way. Yet, most Protestant churches would also say there is something more going on in communion than merely consuming bread and drink. Somehow in the eating of the bread and the drinking of the juice, somehow Jesus shows up. Somehow there is an encounter with the risen Jesus. And Jesus doesn't explain exactly how it happens. But, he feeds us himself because he knows he is that without which we cannot live. He is the bread of life. And, he says, "Feed on me, and you will not die."

Let's finish the sermon, verses 60-71.

IV. The Response of His Disciples (60-71)

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do

you take offense at this? [62](#) Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? [63](#) It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. [64](#) But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) [65](#) And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

[66](#) After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. [67](#) So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” [68](#) Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, [69](#) and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” [70](#) Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” [71](#) He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

A. Only Jesus

We now hear the response of some of his disciples, and they grumble. Indeed this is a hard saying to understand. It *is* offensive. It is a stumbling block. These disciples want a powerful political king, not a sacrificial one. As Paul will say later, *“For we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles”* (1 Cor 1:23). It is offensive. As one writer says, “It is a cascade of offense” (Croasmun, 84). Jesus will suffer and die. Then, he talks of eating flesh and drinking blood. It *is* uncomfortable and confusing. But, the point is He is making himself the issue, and he sometimes must rock our world to get our attention and begin to change us. His way is the only way.

But, He is also claiming to be the only requirement. He is the only way, yes, but he is also the only thing necessary. In other words, our denomination or lack of denomination means nothing. Only Jesus is necessary. Our cultural wrappings and features mean nothing. Only Jesus is necessary. Our style of worship means nothing. Only Jesus is necessary.

For me, this hit home when I went to Liberia the first time in 2009. I bet my eyes were wide open that first time. You talk about a worship service. It is a beautiful thing. They dance during the singing, then dance down the aisles when they put their offerings in the offering box. They regularly say amen and hallelujah. I love preaching there and missed it this year. Their way of worshipping is so different from ours and is a lovely thing. And, here’s the question – are you offended by that? I think I was in 2009. Yet, only Jesus is needed.

Jesus goes onto say that if we can’t handle the message of the cross, how much more difficult will it be to accept his vindication at the resurrection and ascension. These events all go together.

Only he is necessary and he will have to die, and we will have to feed on him. That’s the Gospel and if any of that offends us, then we still think we know better. We think we are the center, not Christ. And, we grumble – grumble – grumble because our pride is offended.

In our text, many disciples leave Jesus. They didn't want him or his way. They want their own agenda.

B. The Spirit

Jesus brings the Spirit back into the conversation here in verse 63. In my view, this is the interpretative key that Jesus is not speaking literally. He is speaking of life through the gift of the Spirit. The life Jesus provides is rooted in the tri-une God, from the Father through the Son by the Spirit. Like his discussion with Nicodemus in chapter 3, Jesus is referring to the necessity of a rebirth by the Spirit. The flesh is no help. We need the Spirit. Like the dry bones in Ezekiel, we need the Spirit to bring us to life.

C. The Confession

The scene ends with the 12 disciples remaining. Jesus lays out his way, the deeper meaning behind his life and work, and they are not offended. They do not leave and Peter steps forward with his courageous confession, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (John 6:68).

V. Reflections

A. Feed on Jesus

And, that completes the Bread of Life sermon. These are some of the most incredible words ever spoken. And, as we reflect on our text today, we hear Jesus inviting us to feed on him. Instead of consuming all those other things through the week, we intentionally and repeatedly are invited to consume him. We take his life into us so that we are nourished and sustained for the journey of faith. We, of course, do this particularly by repeatedly participating in communion, what Thomas Aquinas called "the summit of the spiritual life" (Ringma, 321). Christ, the risen Lord, hosts this meal for us, and wonder of wonders, he also gives himself to us as the spiritual food.

B. Then Live Communion

But we don't stop with the simple act of communion. Having met our risen Lord, our faces now glow with the light and life of Him as we go back into the world. After all, he came for the *"life of the world"* (John 6:51). We feed on him then we go out into the world and breathe his life into the world. We live communion *for the life of the world*. We go back into the world and live the central themes of communion. We die to ourselves so that others may live. We give our lives away for others. We live communion. We take up our cross daily and follow him down the via dolorosa. We live the cruciform life, the sacrificial life, the reconciling life. Last week in our third conversation on race, which was on reconciliation, Rob Barrett spoke (if you missed it, I would encourage you to go watch it). He was excellent. He said this, "Forgiveness – something we learned in Sunday School, but to be Christians, is to actually live it out." Where can you live out communion this week?

But, to live communion is also to be thankful. God, the abundant creator, gave this world to us. He blessed it, then blessed humanity then blessed time, filling the world with his love and goodness. Then out of his great love for us, he gave his life for us, indeed for the life of the

world. The only appropriate response is gratitude and thanksgiving.

Glory – glory – glory!

Amen.

Benediction

Filled to the brim with the love and goodness of the Father God, and the nourishment of Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, and the power of the Holy Spirit,
Go now in peace to be his hands and feet in the bay area and breathing out his life in all you say and do.

Amen.

Resources

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Croasmun, Matthew, *Let Me Ask You a Question: Conversations with Jesus*

Ford, David, *Self and Salvation*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Keener, Craig, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: John*

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*

Lewis, C.S., *God in the Dock*

Ringma, Charles, *Hear the Ancient Wisdom*

Schmemmann, Alexander, *For the Life of the World*