

American Lutheran Church of Sun City
The Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost
August 17 – August 18, 2024
Rev. Lisa Hackler

Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

When my two daughters were teenagers, I had a habit of repeating certain things to them.

“Now remember, you need to be home by 10 pm tonight.”

“You cannot wear that in public.”

“Take out those earphones and listen to what I’m saying.”

“No phones at the dinner table.”

And so on. And they’d respond by saying “Yes mother.” in a tone that indicated they’d heard me say the same thing many times before.

I also repeated good things like “I love you.” To which they’d respond in kind.

Why did I repeat things? Because I thought they were important. I wanted to make sure I got through to them.

My question about Chapter 6 in the gospel of John is this: What is so important about the message that **Jesus is the bread of life** that John repeats it over and over? And why does our lectionary have us reading portions of this story for four Sundays, all on the same theme that Jesus is the bread of life?

First of all, in the gospel of John, the Last Supper is not described. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the Last Supper is described in detail. In John, instead of telling us how Jesus said “Take eat, this is my body” and “This is my blood.” we are simply told that after the meal Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. In the gospel of John, right after the feeding of the 5,000, we have Jesus explaining Holy Communion. The theme of Jesus as the bread of life is repeated over and over in the 6th chapter of John because this is the gospel’s explanation of Holy Communion.

Another difference between John and the other gospels is how graphic John is in describing how Jesus tells his Jewish audience how they must eat the bread of life. In Matthew, Mark, and John, the Greek word used is “soma” which means body. But John uses the Greek word “sarx” which means flesh. In the gospel of John, Jesus shocks the crowd further with words like chewing rather than eating his flesh and words like gulping rather than drinking. Jesus was a Jewish rabbi; he knew the Levitical laws that forbid the drinking of the blood of an animal. In fact, to this day, the complex system of kosher butchering has among its chief aims, that no blood should remain in the animal so there would be no risk of ingesting blood. And yet Jesus told the crowd that he was the bread of life, and they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. Well of course, he wasn’t encouraging cannibalism or breaking the Jewish laws but that is how they heard it, and they were shocked. Why are Jesus’ words so graphic, and visceral?

The words are shocking to make a point. To abide in Jesus isn’t just a nice spiritual idea, it is an incarnate, intimate moment – where God is received into us and engages us at every level. God in Jesus is concretely, intimately, and personally available to us. On the cross, Jesus gives his very flesh for the salvation of the world. When we take the bread and wine of communion, we take God’s forgiveness and salvation into ourselves in a very personal way. The bread and wine of communion is God’s personal, tangible “I love you.” To receive the bread and wine in faith is to receive concrete forgiveness and unshakable eternal life. The bread and wine are objectively other than us and we ingest them and they become part of us, they inhabit our cells, our bloodstream, our thoughts, and our hearts just as Jesus does.

Jesus tells us in verse 56 that “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” The word abide can be misleading because it sounds so comforting. I’ve prayed that Jesus would abide in me and I in Jesus. I would always imagine Jesus abiding in me meant that he would comfort me when I was sad and strengthen me to do the things I wanted to do. He would heal me and help me. And all of that is true! But that isn’t all there is to it. I want Jesus to abide in me and to abide in him. But sometimes Jesus abiding in me has pushed me in directions I wasn’t sure I wanted to go. Abiding with Jesus, the Word made flesh, sometimes results in scripture passages popping into my head at the most inopportune times. I’ll be self-righteously nursing a grudge about how a family member didn’t bother to thank me for a big favor they asked of me when suddenly a verse crosses my mind, “Don’t the sun go down on your anger.” Or I’ll remember the unforgiving servant who was forgiven a huge debt only to turn around and refuse to forgive a small debt. I’ll be nice and comfortable doing the things I know I can do well, and someone will ask me to take on a new project that is way out of my comfort zone, and before I can say no, I remember Jesus saying to the disciples on the boat, “Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?” Ugh. Jesus abiding in me can be downright inconvenient sometimes. Someone will ask me for some help and I’m just about to say no when the story of the Good Samaritan pops into my mind. When Jesus abides in us and we in Him, that same Lord who gave his life for the salvation of the world, is living in us. And yes, that presence is comforting, healing, and strengthening but at times this presence is pushing us, convicting, challenging, and encouraging us to grow in faith and love. And let me tell you, the Jesus abiding in us can prompt us to stretch and grow in faith and courage. Abiding with God can be a gentle breeze refreshing our souls, but at other times it seems God is calling us to give more of ourselves for the work of God’s kingdom. Abiding in God can urge you to immerse yourself in the study of Scriptures, to pray, or to rest as Jesus did. But abiding in Jesus can sometimes result in a call to volunteer time and talents for the sake of others. Abiding with God can be experienced as a moment of Grace where God says “I love you. You do not have to earn my love.” and at the same time you might hear the call to volunteer to further the work of the church in Jesus’ name. When we receive the bread of life from heaven at communion it is a pure gift. We are blessed to receive this gift of grace by faith. May we receive the bread of Life at Communion trusting Jesus to grant

us eternal life, and may we embrace the adventure of Jesus abiding in us, calling us to be part of God's work in this world.