JESUS INVITES US TO EAT HIS FLESH

1. What that means
2. What it offers

I hope you do not get light-headed or queasy easily. I hope you have a strong stomach today, because our text today is not for the faint of heart. The words recorded here in John 6 are pretty graphic. They are words which, if you really think about it, conjure up some pretty horrific images - images of late night horror flicks and satanic rituals. I mean, did you hear what Jesus says? He speaks of the one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood. And for my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. That sounds unreal. Why would Jesus talk like that? What does he mean by that?

These are some of the questions that we want to answer on the basis of God's Word, as we contemplate the fact that here: JESUS INVITES US TO EAT HIS FLESH. We will consider: what that means and what it offers.

First, what does Jesus mean by eat his flesh and drink his blood? You are probably thinking: I know what Jesus is talking about. Obviously, he is talking about the Lord's supper where we take and eat his body and drink his blood. That must be what Jesus is referring to here in our text.

Actually, no. That is not what Jesus is referring to with these words. Even though that would be the logical assumption, and even though there are a number of church bodies which interpret it that way, the fact is Jesus is not referring to Holy Communion in this section. And there are a number of reasons we can say that.

First of all, nowhere in Scripture are the terms flesh and blood used as a reference to the Lord's Supper. Jesus and the apostles always use a different term for the body and blood in Holy Communion.

Secondly, at the time that Jesus spoke the words of text, there was no such thing as the Lord's Supper. Jesus had not yet instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion. He had not yet celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples.

And finally, nowhere in Scripture does Jesus ever say that you must receive the Lord's Supper to be saved, or that if you do partake of the Sacrament, you will have eternal life. No, quite the contrary, Scripture warns that there will be some who will receive this sacrament to their judgment. Scripture also promises that there will be many who will be saved without ever celebrating the Lord's Supper. For example, children who have been baptized and yet die before they are old enough to examine themselves and come to the Lord's table. Or the thief on the cross - Jesus promised him paradise, even though he was not in a position to take and eat the body of Jesus in Holy Communion.

Now, contrast those facts with what Jesus says about eating his flesh and drinking his blood here: 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. Jesus is saying you have to eat his flesh to be saved. He also says: The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. Notice there is no question about it. There is no he might drink judgment on himself. No, it is the one who eats the Lord's flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life. That cannot be a reference to the Lord's Supper.

So, if Jesus is not talking about eating and drinking his body and blood in the Lord's Supper, then what is he talking about? To answer that question, we need to look at the entire context of these words. If you remember from the gospel readings we have been having the last number of weeks, Jesus spoke the words of our text shortly after he had miraculously fed
the crowd of 5,000+. After Jesus had performed that miracle, the people followed him around the lake, looking for more miracle-food, with which they could fill their stomachs. When Jesus' kind of bawls them out for being more concerned about their bodies than their souls, the Jews ask Jesus to give them a miraculous sign to believe in. They say, in effect: Come on, Jesus, Moses gave us bread from heaven to eat. How about you? What will you give us? Jesus' response? Amen, amen, I tell you: Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the real bread from heaven for the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Jesus continues: I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Do you see what Jesus is doing here? He is taking this picture of bread from heaven, this manna that the people were to eat - and he is applying it to himself. He is saying that he is the true bread from heaven. He is the one who will nourish more than their bodies. He is the one who will nourish the souls. He has come to give them spiritual life. That is the connection he has made between the manna bread and himself as bread.

In the section we have as our text, Jesus takes that illustration to the next level. What do you do with bread? You eat it, right? So if Jesus is the bread of life, what are we to do with him? We are to eat him. That is the point Jesus is making here: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves.

Now, the real question is, what does Jesus mean by the words, Eat his flesh? Well, remember Jesus' words to the people: I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty. That is what Jesus means by saying, eat my flesh and drink my blood. He simply means: Believe in him. Trust in him completely. Lay hold of him as your Lord and Savior.

Isn't that exactly what the crowds around Jesus needed to hear? They were all concerned whether they could get another easy meal. They wanted to know what they must do to do the work God requires. They were looking in every direction but the right one. Jesus says: Right here, friends. If you want true nourishment, if you want fulfillment, if you want life that never ends, then you must come to me, Jesus says. I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

So, do you think Jesus' words to the people then still have application for our lives today? Absolutely. How often are you and I not tempted to do the same thing these people around Jesus did? First, we are far too concerned about what is going into our stomach, what kind of clothes we are wearing, whether our homes are paid for, whether our health is good or whether our lives are carefree. We are worried about getting enough physical bread. Secondly, we are tempted to treat God as if he is merely our helper. Someone who does nice things for us once in awhile. Makes our life comfortable on occasion, but not someone we are terribly close to, not someone we are terribly dependent upon. It is like: God, I can use you, but I do not really need you.

That attitude, my friends, is idolatry. It is self-righteousness. It is built into us, and if we cling to it, we will certainly be damned! That is what we deserve from a just and holy God. And that fact ought to have us all on our knees saying: God have mercy on me, a sinner. And you know, that is exactly what God has done, isn't it? He has had mercy on us. For no good reason on our part, he said: I will take your sins upon me. I will, in effect, become your sin and in exchange, you can become my holiness. And how does this great exchange become your personal possession? How does it get credited to your account? It becomes yours by believing it. Jesus is our hope, our everything. He is all that we need and all that we want. As the Psalmist put it: Earth has nothing I desire besides you.
That is what Jesus is inviting you and me to do here in these words. He is inviting us to cling to him. To throw off any hope we have of saving ourselves and lay hold of him, take him deep into our heart. Digest his promises. Lay claim to Jesus as God in the flesh and your only Savior from sin. That is what Jesus means by **eating his flesh and drinking his blood**. He means believe in him.

Now, if we do that, that is, if by the power of the gospel, the Holy Spirit leads us to put our trust in Jesus, what promises does God make us? Or to put it in the terminology that Jesus uses here, what does eating Jesus’ flesh offer us? Jesus says it offers a number of things. We just heard Jesus say that whoever eats his flesh has eternal life. Most of the people who ate the manna in the desert died - forever. But those who eat of Jesus, the Bread of Life, will live forever.

Jesus also says that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood remains in him and he in them. In other words, it is faith in Jesus Christ that intimately connects us to him and he to us. And as long as we are connected to Christ, God will give us the strength to be the kind of patient, loving, caring parents, spouses, children and employees that God has called us to be. That is what Jesus meant when he said in John 15: **If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.**

So, how, exactly, do we go about strengthening our connection to Christ? How do we fully eat his flesh and drink his blood? Well, there are only two ways for Jesus to come to us and allow us to partake of him. one way is right here – Holy Communion. Here, through a sacramental eating, Jesus does offer his body and blood, in with, and under the bread and wine. Through the forgiveness of sins that God offers in his Sacrament, Jesus restores the relationship which your sins destroyed between you and him. In the gift of forgiveness, you can, in fact, depart in peace.

The second way that Jesus comes to us is through his Word. The more we know about Jesus’ life, his words, his will for our lives, the more we have to chew on and believe in, and apply to our lives. We have a full course menu of God’s Word offered here, offered in various styles and locations, for young and old alike. All of them offer the kind of spiritual food which can truly nourish your soul and positively effect your life. Or as Jesus puts it, all of them will give you a chance to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Only in this case, you will not need a strong stomach. All you really need is a hungry heart. May God that grant it to each one of us. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz  
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City  
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill