

## Laetare - John 6

Jesus is the Bread of Life. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever. Those who come to Jesus will never go hungry, and those who believe in him will never thirst. By multiplying five barley loaves and two fish to feed a crowd of five thousand, Jesus satisfied everyone's hunger. But this was only a shadow of the true satisfaction Jesus came to bring. When they wanted to take him by force and make him king, Jesus withdrew from them. He didn't come to fulfill a political agenda or carry out a mandate from people who elected him. No, he came to do the will of his Father. He came to give his life into death. He came to satisfy God's anger against sinners, making atonement for all people. He therefore teaches us not to labor for food that perishes. Don't labor simply for daily bread. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Feed on every word that comes from him.

This account teaches us that Jesus is the creator of this world, yet his kingdom is not of this world. He is the Son of God by whom all things were made. From him all creatures receive their daily bread. And yet, he came to give something much greater than earthly bread. He came to give himself. He is the Bread of Life. He is the true God and eternal life. He became flesh, and he gave his flesh into death, bearing the sin of all people. In this way, his flesh gives life to the world. He therefore urges us not to live merely for earthly bread. Don't live for your stomach. Don't labor for the food that spoils and perishes. No, labor for the food that endures forever. Everything you do, whether in word or deed, do in the name of Jesus Christ, giving thanks to the Father through him.

When you read through the entirety of John chapter 6, it's difficult not to think about the Lord's Supper. After all, Jesus provides bread for the multitude. He takes the five loaves, gives thanks, and distributes them to the people. This resembles what he did with his disciples in the upper room on the night of his betrayal before he died on the cross. And then, the next day, Jesus continues to speak of eating and drinking. Later on in that same chapter, he says, I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don't have any life in you. If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have everlasting life, and I will raise you on the last day. My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, then you remain in me and I in you. As the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so if you feed on me, you will live because of me. This is the Bread that came down from heaven. It isn't like the bread the fathers ate. They died. Eat this Bread, and you will live forever. (John 6:53-58)

After Jesus said all of this, many of those who had been following him turned away from him. They said, "This is hard to understand. Who can listen to him?"

It often happens that people can't accept what Jesus says in his Supper. They deny that bread can actually be his body or that wine can actually be his blood. But in this sixth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus is speaking of something even more difficult than that. He is teaching us faith. Faith is much more difficult than outward eating and drinking. Jesus isn't yet talking about taking and eating his body and blood in the bread and the wine. He is certainly preparing his disciples for this. But before you can accept what Jesus says in the upper room before his suffering and death, you must first learn who Jesus is and what he came to do. He is the only Son of God, and he came to do the will of his Father. He is true God and true man, eternally begotten of the Father and now joined to human flesh and blood forever. He gave himself up for the sins of the world, suffered the unspeakable wrath of God against our sins, and was raised from the dead by the glory of his Father.

This means that there is no nurture or satisfaction outside of what Jesus did in his flesh. Outside of his obedience, outside of his baptism in the Jordan, outside of his temptation in the wilderness, outside of his words, works, suffering, dying, and resurrection, you have no life at all.

This is what was so hard and difficult about Jesus' words. It's why so many of his disciples went home and stopped following him. It's because our Lord's words don't allow us to find comfort in anything other than in him. But we naturally find comfort in earthly things. Our Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom. Our human reason and strength cannot do what faith does. You can't come to Jesus unless the Father himself draws you to him. How does your human reason react when he tells you to deny yourself and to lose your life, to pick up your cross and follow him? When he tells you that unless you hate your own flesh and blood then you can't be his disciple, do you find this insulting? Can you find life and everlasting satisfaction in this Man hanging on the cross, spit upon, and rejected by all? Does the thought of eating his flesh and drinking his blood repulse you? Can you drink from the bitter cup of his suffering and death and find in it your only source of life, comfort, and blessing? Can you lay claim to nothing in this world, be satisfied by nothing that goes into your stomach, and cling only to what his cross has won? They are hard words, aren't they? Your flesh and blood cannot do this. Only faith, drawn by God the Father himself, can do this.

Only faith can consume nothing but the living flesh and blood of the Son of God, because only Christ, who turned God's anger away, gives life to the world. Only faith can be satisfied with what Christ says and does, because only Christ has made satisfaction for our sins. Until you learn this, you are unprepared to take his body and blood into your mouth, much less bear your cross or fight against temptations or walk the path your Lord has prepared for you. If you labor only for an outward meal, then you labor in vain. Instead, labor for the food that endures for eternal life. Rest on Christ whose food is to do the will of his Father who sent him.

The crowds came to hear Jesus, because they saw the miracles he did on those who were sick. They then saw what he did with the five loaves and the two pieces of fish. They ate, and they were satisfied. So it is today. Jesus gives many blessings to those who follow him. He gives godly friends who care for you. He teaches you discipline and responsibility. Going to church on a regular basis can certainly help keep your life in order. Imagine how many crimes, acts of violence, divorces, adulteries, perversions, fraud, and other broken relationships would be prevented if people devoted themselves to learning God's Word and gathering with others who do the same. There's a reason why churches get tax exemptions. Healthy churches are good for the culture. They're good for society. When people learn to behave and live at peace with one another, then this often results in more prosperity as well. God provides all this. He gives daily bread, wine to gladden the heart, leisure, and all good things in which our bodies can take comfort and be satisfied.

But what about when all these things go away? What happens when your days of gladness turn into bitter sadness? When the light of God's Word uncovers your sin and your guilt and your shame, where do you go? When God's Word tells you to obey and submit to those whom you have a hard time respecting, what do you do? When someone sins against you and Jesus tells you to forgive, when someone makes you suffer and Jesus tells you to bear it, when no one helps you and Jesus tells you to pray – does this satisfy you? Those who think they stand on their own will quickly fall and be offended by our Lord's words and deeds.

Only faith can be satisfied by what Jesus says and does. Only faith can find comfort in his death and hope in his resurrection. Only faith can truly eat and be nurtured by the Bread of Life. You

won't find any of this in your own abilities, your own positive thoughts, or the struggles of your heart.

This is why we confess in the Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him." Only the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the Father can draw us to the Son. And this is exactly what he does. He gives you the faith to trust in Christ. And your faith, however weak, always finds what it seeks in Christ.

Now you might not feel satisfaction in your body. You might have a hard time discerning this comfort in your soul. But you can be sure that the food Jesus gives from his pierced side remains forever. Just ask yourself: Did Jesus do what his Father sent him to do? Was the Father satisfied with his work? Did he bear all your sin in his flesh and spill his blood for you? Does he cover you with his righteousness? Yes. As surely as he is risen from the dead, he remains the Bread of Life. He remains your true food and drink. So feed on his gospel. Draw strength from his words. Even when what he says seems hard, even when he is teaching you to humble yourself and forgive and submit and put up with all sorts of miserable stuff, his words always strengthen you. They always sustain you and feed you. And you will not be left unsatisfied. Because these are the words of him who gave himself up for you, always forgives you, and always has mercy on you. And as Peter said at the end of this chapter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life."

When you find no satisfaction in your own sin-stained works and efforts, and you simply want to hear about Jesus, this is nothing other than to desire the words of everlasting life. It is to hunger and thirst for righteousness. It is to desire the gospel. To look to the promise of baptism is nothing other than to look to the gospel. To hunger for the Lord's Supper is nothing other than a hunger for this same gospel. To long for a Christian friend who can comfort you and remind you of your Savior is nothing other than to desire the gospel. It's a desire to feed on the words of Christ. It is to eat and drink everything that comes from Christ, the Bread of Life.

Even when his words come as crumbs falling from his table, you can be sure that they stand forever. Your faith is fed by the same Lord who provides for our bodily needs. This is why he also attaches his heavenly food to earthly food, giving you his words of eternal life even in his body and blood hidden under bread and wine. You therefore daily eat and drink Christ's flesh and blood by trusting in his words. In this way, your Lord is preparing you to eat and drink his body and blood with your mouth as well. All the while, you find your comfort and refuge from sin in his saving death and resurrection. He remains our food and drink every day. Those who come to him will never go hungry. Those who believe in him will never thirst. He will by no means cast you out. He, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, is the true God and everlasting life. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.