

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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John 6:51-66

Two Key Questions from John 6

- 1. To Jesus: What do you mean?!**
- 2. From Jesus: So what will it be?**

Hymns: 234 (1-3) – 466 – 403 – 356

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

John 6: 51-66 –

⁵¹ *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”* ⁵² *Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”*

⁵³ *Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”* ⁵⁴ *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.* ⁵⁵ *For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.* ⁵⁶ *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.* ⁵⁷ *Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.* ⁵⁸ *This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”* ⁵⁹ *He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.*

⁶⁰ *On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”* ⁶¹ *Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you?”* ⁶² *What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!* ⁶³ *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.* ⁶⁴ *Yet there are some of you who do not believe.”* *For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.* ⁶⁵ *He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”*

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

Beloved Scripture passages! We all have certain ones that we love, don't we? I think of verses such as:

- “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads beside quiet waters. He restores my soul.” (Ps. 23)*
- “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Mt. 11)*
- “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Rm. 8)*

Beloved sections of Scripture, all of them. But I don't think any of you would think of this one: *“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life... For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”*

Is that a beloved section to you? If it isn't, you have a great deal of company. 2000 years ago, when Christ first uttered those words, they were not met with hearts of faith and rave reviews.

As we close our look at John 6, which is a gem of a chapter in Scripture and from which we've had a number of Gospel Lessons on the past Sundays, let's focus on these words of Jesus and try to learn from them. In fact, these words might even be

on your “beloved” list by the time that we’re done. **Today we will look at: “Key Questions from John 6”:**

1. **For Jesus: What do you mean?!**
2. **From Jesus: So what will it be?**

1. To Jesus: What do you mean?!

Let’s set the scene of when Jesus said these words. Jesus was a little over two years into his three-year ministry, and he was very popular. He had fed 5000 men, plus women and children, at the beginning of this chapter. Crowds were following him. Jesus withdrew with his disciples to try to avoid the crowds for a time. But they followed him and found him. They wanted more from him! As he told them, they wanted more bread from him. They wanted him to be their Bread King and leader!

At this time of high popularity, Jesus’ teaching turned into deeper discussion and more difficult lessons. In our reading he said, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”*⁵² *Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”*⁵³ *Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”*⁵⁴ *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*⁵⁵ *For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.*⁵⁶ *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.*⁵⁷ *Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.*⁵⁸ *This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate*

manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Jesus, what does this mean?

At first glance, some Christians have thought there is a reference to the Lord’s Supper in these verses. After all, “take and eat” and “Jesus’ body and blood” are themes very similar to that sacrament. However, there are a number of reasons we need to rule out Holy Communion in this discussion:

- 1) Jesus’ use of the word “flesh” here rings different from his use of the word “body” in the Lord’s Supper.
- 2) The Lord’s Supper hadn’t been instituted yet! Jesus had not yet given this sacred feast to his disciples on the night when he was betrayed. To think that a reference to communion would be logical and understandable at this time is be reasonable.
- 3) Jesus’ words here make the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood a requirement to be saved. He is clear that without doing this, a person is not saved. If so, there are many OT believers in trouble! And the thief on the cross? He would not be headed for paradise.
- 4) Jesus’ is clear here that that this eating and drinking is a guarantee of salvation. If this eating and drinking takes place, a person is surely saved. Yet if this is true of communion, what about hypocrites, unbelievers, the uninstructed, and unworthy recipients who have taken the Lord’s Supper? Would God really guarantee their salvation in the outward ritual of having received communion? No.

So Jesus, what do you mean?

Here are some clues. Keep in mind that in John 6 Jesus gets deeper and deeper into his illustration and its graphic picture:

- In verse 29 they asked Jesus, *“What must we do to do the works God requires?”* Jesus answered, *“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*
- In verse 40 Jesus reiterates his point. It says, *“Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”*
- In verse 40, he repeats his point again: *“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

These are all ways of expressing the more graphic illustration that Jesus moves into later in the chapter, namely eating the Bread of Life and drinking his blood. **He is talking about faith and full trust in him as Savior.**

The only reason he goes into this illustration in the first place is because they pushed the picture of bread at him! After he told them he has been sent from heaven, they said, *“What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ”* (vv. 30-31) So he followed their example of bread and told them he is true and living Bread from heaven. And in the consummate act of what you do with bread, he told them that they must consume him (believe in him) to be saved. It was the same with Living Water with the woman at the well in John 4. What do you do with water from

the well? Jesus said to her, *“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.”*

Jesus was not there to merely be a chef, a Provider, or even a Healer. They needed to know that he must be a part of them! They must:

- Consume him
- Be a part of him
- And have him be a part of them
- Have a continuous relationship with him
- All of him
- Only him
- Completely him

And his claim was that he was better than Moses or their forefathers, along with the manna that God gave in the OT, a big claim in their eyes. But he was better!

Christ even mentioned the beautiful results when a person has “consumed” him, or believed in him. When a person put their trust in the flesh that would be given in a sacrifice for the life of the world on the cross, they would have eternal life. When they trusted that Christ was their Savior who died for them and who rose again from the dead, they had the assurance that he would raise them up on the Last Day to receive their inheritance of heaven and life with him forever!

All this was illustrated by Christ in a picture that they (and all of us) could see and experience every day as they would eat a meal. “This is what I have done with the news of my Savior Christ. I have consumed it and it is part of me!”

2. From Jesus: So what will it be?

Before we close our look at John 6, we have another key question to ponder. It's not the question we put to Christ concerning what he means by this teaching, it's a question that Jesus now asks us: **"So what will it be?"** What now, Christian, now that you have heard my teaching?

Looking back to that day long ago when Jesus said those words, we see interesting reactions: *"Many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' ⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you? ⁶² What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe.'* For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, *'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.'* From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

It caused his disciples to experience some vivid feelings that are pictured with pretty vivid words in John 6:

- Grumbling – There was murmuring among the masses! We might picture some silent moments after Jesus delivered his teaching, perhaps some dissatisfied "buzzing" in the crowd here and there?
- Hard – Literally, this Greek word means "dry, hard, rough." In other words, it wasn't so much hard to

understand but an unpleasant, hard thought to accept.

- Offend you? – The picture is one of tripping and stumbling. Jesus was asking if this teaching was causing them to stumble in their faith, or (from the Greek word) if they felt this was a "scandalous" teaching.
- Did not believe – Jesus knew in himself that there were unbelievers and hypocrites present.
- Turned back – This teaching was a watershed time for many of Jesus' former followers. They went home! They had had enough of this adventure and they were done with him.

Why was there such a problem? There are a couple possibilities. The first one is that they had no clue and that Jesus' teaching was nonsense to them. This interpretation would mean that he was talking over their heads and they could not grasp at all what he was saying by suggesting such eating and drinking.

I don't think that was the case. I think Jesus as Master Teacher was using a picture they could pick up on just fine, and that they – against better judgment – rejected him and his teaching that day. Look at the clues:

- vv. 29-31 – When Jesus told them that they should *"believe in the one (God) has sent,"* (meaning himself), they asked him, *"What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert..."* **We see a crowd that got what he was saying and didn't like it and therefore challenged him.**

- vv. 41,42 – At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, *“I am the bread that came down from heaven.”* They said, *“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”* **They got what he was saying, but couldn’t believe it because of his background.**
- v. 63 – Jesus clearly tells them, *“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”* **He explained that this was a spiritual teaching, not a cannibalistic one.** With the OT laws clearly forbidding drinking blood (Lev. 17) they didn’t take him to task for teaching against the law of Moses!

I’d submit to you that this was a case of clear rejection of the principle that Jesus was teaching quite well that day, the teaching that only and completely in him is their salvation for their souls. But like a young man or woman who gets scared of commitment in a relationship and says, “I’m outta here!” they bolted on Jesus and rejected him.

Jesus poses the same question to you today: “So what will it be?” John has laid out the teachings of that day very clearly for us, and here we are listening to these words this morning. There certainly are warnings here for us. When you consider the identity of Jesus and the depth of your need for him, what will it be? Is his message distasteful to you?

- You are, as the Apostle Paul put it, chief of sinners. You are helpless and in total need of Christ, blind and lost in sin. You come as a beggar. Distasteful to you?

- You will find your eternal salvation only in Christ. This is one teaching that has been discarded by many Christians and churches in our day. Unfortunately, the false teaching about many paths besides Christ leading to heaven has been promoted in our age. Yet we are saved “in Christ alone.” Distasteful to you?

If we look at the wider teachings of Christ that you know from Scripture, are there other teachings that might be distasteful to you?

- To follow him, you must carry a cross. The crown in its full glory comes later! But in this world you will have trouble. Distasteful?
- You must leave certain things behind. Pet sins, sinful thoughts and goals, selfish ambition. Distasteful?
- Spiritual growth is involved in following Christ. You should not remain on milk, but solid food is for the mature, the book of Hebrews says. Regular church attendance, Bible class, spiritual growth. Distasteful?
- A life of service is involved, not to earn your salvation but which shows your faith and serves your Lord and fellow man. Using your gifts, spending your time, expending your energies as you use God-given abilities. Distasteful?

“So what will it be? Do you want to leave and go home?” Jesus asks. Many a

confirmand has. Many a recent convert has. Many a lifelong believer has.

In answering that question, we come to some of the most comforting words yet in John 6. In asking this question, Jesus isn't implying the question, "Do you have it in you?" (I think many of you by this time have despaired a bit of "finding it in you," but that's not the answer!)

Jesus also said in these verses, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*" God the Father is the One who has made the move and who will keep you firm in the faith. Jesus also said, "*I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.*" God the Father is the One who has elected you, redeemed you, and converted you through his Holy Spirit. And, as Paul wrote in Philippians 1, "*He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*" It's God's strength. It's God's power. It's God's working that will keep you firm in the faith.

As we recognize that fact, it is only fitting that we should close our thoughts today with the two verses after our reading where Jesus poses his question to Peter and the Twelve: "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*"

Today, as we see key questions and doctrines in the Bread of Life discourse, may God lead us to say the same. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Amen.