



12th Sunday after Pentecost
August 12, 2018
John 6:41-51

The Bread of Life... 3) Is Given In Grace

When the United States bought Alaska in 1867, not everyone thought it was a good purchase. Critics grumbled against it and called it "Seward's frow" and "Seward's icebox" after secretary of state William Seward who negotiated the purchase price from Russia. They thought that there could be little of any value in such a cold land. Of course, history has proved them wrong many times over. They didn't understand the real value of Alaska and wanted to reject the offer. I'm sure their grumbling was frustrating for Seward and others who saw great value in Alaska. Sometimes we can wrongly grumble against something we don't understand. This happens with the Bread of Life, Jesus. He has been rejected and grumbled against by many who fail to see him as worth anything. How does God respond to those who grumble against his extraordinary claims? We find the answer as we continue reading John 6.

We've been reading about a group of Jews from Galilee who *came searching for Jesus because he did something extraordinary*. These are the very same people who had tasted and eaten the bread which Jesus had miraculously provided. The next day after they found him in Capernaum. It was clear they wanted more of this miraculous food. But Jesus responded by teaching them, "You don't just need ordinary bread; you need eternal bread from heaven!" This led the crowd to respond, "Wow, Jesus you're right! Eternal food. Can you give us such eternal bread?" But Jesus wasn't speaking about *food* for the stomach. He was talking about spiritual food. It was then that he made an extraordinary claim: "I AM the bread *from heaven* that you need!"

The crowd had a hard time swallowing this extraordinary claim. "Is he serious? Is he really saying that he came from heaven?" *The Jews grumbled concerning him because he said "I am the bread coming down from heaven."* You can imagine the murmuring: "He claims to be from heaven!" "Okay, last we checked, Jesus, you didn't come storming out of the sky on bolts of lightning with clapping thunder and blaring trumpets."

Things really haven't changed. Jesus' extraordinary claim still stands today. He came from heaven and is just what we need. This is what we believe and confess. We celebrate it at Christmas. We say it often together in the Nicene Creed, "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven." But still today we see the same response to this claim about Jesus. Movies, documentaries, and reactions to Bible all grumble against his claims. They end up concluding that Jesus was really just an ordinary human being who faced an unfortunate, horrific death on the cross. They are pretty sure they have him all figured out. "How could he say, 'I came down from heaven.'"

What are we to do when someone grumbles against Jesus' claims? Some people like to put forward some proof. They point to modern miracles of healing, to signs, and to speaking in tongues all as proof that we must believe Jesus' claims. Some form circular arguments and cry, "If Jesus isn't real, then why did he answer my prayer for help?" Others might reason, "Jesus has to be really from heaven, how else can you explain why there are Christians throughout the world?" Some like to point out, "The Bible is the only ancient book that fully traces man's history from start to finish." Finally not uncommon today is the so-called proof of emotion, "I feel God's love, Jesus is real in my heart. He must be real!" Others follow the Scriptural claim, "He was from heaven because he vacated his grave and returned to heaven!" They point to the witnesses who saw him alive and the empty tomb. All different types of evidence are tossed at those who grumble so they can chew on it.

Observing the facts, however, cannot lead someone to accept Jesus' extraordinary claim. Recall what we read earlier this morning. If anyone ever proved the LORD to be real, it was Elijah! He went up against 450 prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth. Scream as they would all day long they could not win the contest by getting their false god to answer and light their altar. But when Elijah prayed to the Lord. Then all at once fire came down from heaven and it consumed Elijah's water-drenched altar. Clearly the Lord was proven as true! The people had to confess, "The Lord is God!" But in the end this amounted to very little change of heart. Even though he won the extraordinary contest and proved the claim that the LORD is the real God, many still rejected the Lord as God. So too the crowd that ate the bread from Jesus couldn't believe that Jesus is Lord. The miracle, with its clear sign and evidence, failed to create faith in those who listened to Jesus.

Why can't people accept Jesus' extraordinary claims? Listen to what Jesus says to the crowd. "Quit grumbling among yourselves. No one is able to come to me..." Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Most don't believe in me, or only a few smart ones actually come to me, or only those that take the time to look at the observable facts come to me." No. He makes it clear, "*No one* is able to come to me." Coming to Jesus, that is believing in him, involves far more than just hearing the facts and conceding that they could be true. Even the demons know there is a God, and they shudder. Believing Jesus is not a matter of observing the facts, it is a spiritual matter.

And coming to faith in Jesus is a spiritual endeavor which no one can do. That's because coming to Jesus involves overcoming spiritual rebellion against him! When the first man and woman first sinned, they did not want to come to God! They knew who he was and who they had become! For this very reason they wanted him far away! They hid from him in fear. The apostle Peter was given strong observable evidence that Jesus was divine. Jesus miraculously caused an extraordinary catch of fish for Peter.

But when Peter realized Jesus was the divine Messiah who came down from heaven he shouted, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Peter understood Jesus to be a holy and righteous God! One who would not tolerate sin!

We are by nature no better than those before us. When we begin to think that we ourselves came to accept Jesus, these words echo back at us: "*No one* is able to come to me." No one is able to change themselves from God's enemy to God's friend, it is spiritually impossible. If it were left to us and our judgments and observations, by nature we too would only end up grumbling against Jesus. We would take his extraordinary claim, "I came from heaven to be just what you need!" and we would cry, "Yeah, let me see the picture of you coming from heaven!" The truth is we didn't come to Jesus by our own reasoning. And no amount of proof or miracles could make us come to him. We spiritually cannot do anything but grumble against him and reject him.

How ought God to respond to those who grumble against his claims? Ought he not to take those who grumble and deal with them accordingly? And should we not by nature as grumblers and doubters join those demons that rebelled against their creator? What's left for the grumblers is only death and eternal punishment assigned for the enemies of God.

Yet God would not respond to our grumbling by leaving us in darkness, fear, and under the sentence of death. Look at what Jesus gives the people in response to their grumbling: "Stop grumbling among yourselves! No one can come to me, (no one can have faith in me), unless the Father who sent me draws him." Since we cannot by our own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ or come to him, God *draws* us to himself. It is *his divine power* which has always drawn men back to himself. And what God the Father says he will begin, God the Son promises to finish: "On the last day, I will raise up those whom God has drawn to me."

What does he use to draw us to himself? Jesus points them to the Word of God. "It is written in the prophets, 'They will all be taught by God.' He is speaking about all believers! This quote is from Isaiah 54. It's a beautiful picture of God's church brought to enjoy the eternal gift from heaven from Jesus. We hear the Word of God, learn from it, and then by God's working through his Holy Spirit we believe in Jesus. "Whoever listens to the Father and learns from him" comes to Jesus.

Since we could not come to God, he came down from heaven to come to us. "I am the bread coming down from heaven." God the Father sent his Son to give us what we need. "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father." What Jesus is saying is a truth echoed throughout Scripture. We only come to know God the Father through the Word of God and this is revealed through his Son Jesus. *He tells them:* "Truly I say to you: the one who believes in me has eternal life." That is the gospel message! You might have something like John 3:16 as a reference in your head. You might have that verse memorized. John 6:47 is the same message, only even shorter and simpler. Believe in Jesus and you live forever! "I am the living bread! Here is the bread coming down from heaven which you can eat and never die!" Take in Jesus and *live forever!*

And this bread is ours purely by his grace. "The bread which I give is my own flesh on behalf of the life of the world!" The man Jesus came to give life to the world. Though all things are his, he came to earth, setting aside his divine glory, to become a man. In grace he lowered himself and became fully human. There was no clapping thunder, there was no *Frontline* feature interview, there was no world headline. In complete humility he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born into the ordinary home of Mary and Joseph. Why? In grace to give himself for us all. Jesus willing came for one single purpose: to give his flesh, his life. He could have called on armies from heaven to stop the small band of soldiers that took him prisoner. But he set aside his glory, came as the living bread, a man, so that they could grab hold of him and take him away and drive nails through his flesh. And when the people said, "Save yourself if you are the Son of God!" He could have done so and proved himself as God's Son in the flesh! But he didn't come from heaven to save himself. And he certainly didn't come just to prove himself divine. In grace he came. He came to draw all people to himself by being lifted up on the cross. He came to give his life in place of the world. The flesh that the eternal one shed on the cross was the eternal payment for all sin. It is by his death that he won life for sinners. Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. That's grace.

That gift of life was not only won in grace; it is shared in grace. Though the world -including us – by nature can only grumble against Jesus, his gospel comes to us. God draws us to Jesus. So, when someone grumbles give them the gospel. That message need not be complicated or difficult when you share it! The Bread of Life can be served in crumbs or in a feast. It can be given as milk, or as solid food. Sharing the gospel is how we respond to those who think they have Jesus all figured out. We give them a small drip of water, we hand them a bite sized crumb of the bread of life. This is the divine power that God uses to draw people. The Bread of Life is 1) prepared and provided in grace 2) served to us grumblers in grace.

So, how did William Seward answer his critics. He couldn't convince them of Alaska's value. But the critics who couldn't see any immediate riches couldn't have been more wrong! Alaska was hiding more than ice. It contained a tremendous amount of resources. The critics were silenced less than thirty years later when word came of the Klondike gold strike. Even when adjusting for inflation the so-called "Seward's folly" only cost 110 million in today's dollars. But it holds an estimated worth of several trillions of dollars of proven gas and oil reserves as well as the gold, copper, and many other resources discovered. Add to that the natural beauty of the land! Only when people tasted and saw for themselves could they begin to see its value! How much more isn't the grumbling out of place when people grumble against the value of Christ? The only solution: give the gospel. Let the Father draw them to experience the goodness of God in Jesus. Let them taste the Bread of Life. How does God respond to those who grumble against Jesus? THE BREAD OF LIFE IS GIVEN IN GRACE.