



There is a movie series in which someone is being hounded by a killing machine from the future. In one of the scenes a woman who knows there are death machines chasing after her is stunned when she realizes she has only one option for safety. A machine-man from the future extends his hand toward her. Then he utters a phrase with his Austrian accent. It is a phrase which is repeated in four movies from the series. And it has been echoed countless times in pop-culture parody, "Come with me if you want to live." The choice is obvious: be terminated by a killing machine robot from the future, or take up the offer of safety and protection from a friend. As we continue reading today in John 6 we see Jesus' extend this same offer. He offers life. Without him there is only death. Today we continue in John 6 as we see just how THE BREAD OF LIFE IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

Let's just take one minute to quickly recap what we have covered the past weeks in John 6. Jesus has said much about the Bread of Life. He has laid out some very hard-to-swallow claims. Firstly, he gets them to think beyond ordinary food to spiritual food. Then he points out that he is no ordinary man. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven." Just as the manna was a gift of God from heaven, he himself came as a gift from heaven. He offers eternal life. Eating manna and bread gives life; he gives something even greater. "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." I'm sure we've all heard the extraordinary claims by various products. We've heard claims by the weight-loss miracle products, the energy boosters, and the complete nutrition products. But Jesus claim is greater even than that of the fountain of youth. Partake of him and live forever.

Then he points them to how he plans to dish up this spiritual food. He offers himself! He himself is the Bread of Life because it is by his giving his own flesh and blood that he gives us life! And he serves it up for all the world. The bread that Jesus offers is his own flesh, which he will give for the life of the world. Consider what is all contained in that claim! We've heard of product claims, and programs that supposedly reach many people. "Over 99 billion served." "99.9% of our proceeds go to help the needy." "5 dollars will feed a family for a week." Jesus' claim is a serving offered for all humanity! Jesus says he will give his flesh as the source of life for all who believe!

Today we add one more truth about the Bread of Life. It is both an invitation and an ultimatum. "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.'" This is where the truth hits even harder. He's not just a source of life. He is the *only* source of spiritual food which gives life. This is an absolute claim. There can be no other way, no other bread to feed on for spiritual food.

This brings us now to see two very important truths. Notice on the one hand that the Christian faith is very inclusive. It is for all. Jesus has said he gives his flesh for all the world. He has said whoever believes in him has life. The message "believe in Jesus, live forever" is a most inclusive invitation for all the world. On the other hand, Christianity is a very exclusive faith. It does not leave room for anyone to choose between option A or option B. There are not multiple paths to heaven. There are not multiple sources of spiritual food which can give eternal life. There is one option for life, one path for life, one source for life. Jesus' claim is clear. He basically is saying, "Unless you partake of me, you have no life." Or "Come with me if you want to live." The people in the wilderness when they left Egypt would surely have starved without the manna. They would have thirsted to death without the water from the rock. We spiritually cannot live without Jesus as our source of life.

This exclusive claim brings us to realize a sad truth. Its sometimes expressed as "no Jesus, no peace." Or as Jesus phrases it here, "No Bread of Life, no life." This is the sad reality for all who reject Jesus as the Bread of Life. Everyone who does not have Jesus as their source of spiritual food will miss out on life. They will not have peace with God now, and they never will without Jesus. The crowds before Jesus were offered the bread of life. It was all ready and prepared for them. Like the manna from heaven this bread from heaven was freely and graciously given to them. But sadly many of them preferred other food. The work-righteous attitude is revealed when they say, "What must we do to do the work God requires?" They wanted to cook their own spiritual food, make their own spiritual nourishment. They wanted to provide for themselves what only God could give them.

What "bread" is Jesus inviting us to feed on? He says, "listen to me! I give you my flesh and blood." He shares his good news, the gospel, in Word and Sacrament for us to receive his blessings! In the Lutheran church we have labeled this spiritual food the "Means of Grace." We feed on Jesus through his means of grace. He serves up the gospel in the Bible, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Through faith we receive the only food that gives us life! The gospel in word and sacrament feeds and nourishes our souls. It calms our fears more than food calms our hunger. It tells us, "Whoever believes has eternal life, and Jesus will raise you up on the last day."

No other spiritual food will do! No other message, no other book, no other sacrament can be found apart from the gospel of Jesus found in his Word and his sacraments. It doesn't matter how much spiritual food you try to cook up. No matter how well intentioned or spiritual someone might be, it all amounts to nothing without Jesus. Anyone who does not have faith in Jesus as the the Son of God who came down from heaven to offer his life on behalf of the world is without eternal life. The muslim, the work-righteous who is Christian only in name, the latter-day-saint, the Hindu, the new-age deist, the agnostic, the humansit, the Buddhist, the person who is spiritual but doesn't set aside all other sources of spiritual food besides Jesus *does not have life*. In fact, you must discard all other spiritual food as poison, and say like the apostle Paul, "I consider all my lineage, my habits, my achievements, my good works as rubbish... in order that I might gain Christ!"

Do we always treat the Bread of Life, his gospel in Word and Sacrament as absolutely necessary? You obviously don't regard the plate of food which God puts before us as something trivial. That's why you listen to his Word. That's why you partake of his Supper. But might we sometimes begin to see it as less than vital or feed on it less than we ought?

I was talking to someone once who said they were spiritually satiated because they already heard or read the Bible once. I have actually heard this from a number of people. They usually say it to indicate they are not hungry for God's Word or have no current need for it. You might know someone like this. They may have tasted the Bread of Life in the past, but what are they doing now? Jesus says, "the one who feeds on me will live because of me." The Greek word for "feed" here is one that almost gives us the idea of eager munching. We don't just eat the bread of life and then say, "I'm done with that." We must see the gospel as absolutely necessary to give us life and to keep us spiritually alive. We need to long for it like the deer longs for streams of water. It sustains us in our faith. When a believer in Christ who is starving themselves spiritually says, "I've read the Bible once." Or "I just don't have time for that anymore." I resist the temptation to sarcastically reply, "Really? I had breakfast once." We all must feed on Jesus. We must all continue to feed on him.

And this is no game. We are not being hounded by a killer machine robot from the future. But we have a situation far more dire. If we neglect the bread Jesus offers then we are going to helplessly die of spiritual starvation. We can lose the gift of faith. And we are on the menu of the devil who wanders around like a lion looking for someone to devour. If we do not have Jesus, we are easily devoured in his trap. Then, having too long rejected Jesus' invitation to come with him and live, we remain apart from him. No Bread of Life, no life. There is only death, the devil, God's curse on sinners. We are cut off from the one source of life. Without the Bread of Life "...you have no life in you."

But with Jesus and what he offers we have a life that no one can take away! "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood *has eternal life*, and I will raise him up *at the last day*." This life is now. Notice says, "has life." And it lasts forever. "I will raise him up on the last day." And it is a promise for everyone who believes, everyone who feeds on him. As we in faith partake of this food we know his promise is good for us! Notice Jesus doesn't say, "*only some* who feed (partake of his gospel in faith) on me have life" His promise is absolute, "*Whoever* eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." So the Scriptures declare, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." "Whoever believes in him will not perish."

Why is this so absolutely true? Jesus really did give his life and shed his blood for us. "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink." His blood was shed. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Pt 1:18) He is real spiritual food because he really did come from heaven. He really did take on human flesh. He really did offer up his life as a sacrificial payment for the sins of the whole world. He really did suffer all the curse for sin on the cross for us. He really was dead and was buried. He really did rise. Jesus doesn't need us for life. He lives just as the Father lives. He is the eternal Son of God and is self-sufficient. But we need him for life. So the risen and living Jesus really did say, "he who believes has eternal life."

And the real result of faith in him is a real and lasting life! He will raise us up on the last day. It is a bodily resurrection from death. Like Job we really will say, "*Though my flesh has been destroyed yet will I see God, with my own eyes, I and not another!*" Why? Because we fed on real spiritual food. And so the Words of Christ are fulfilled which say, "Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

There was a pastor once who came to a mansion home. The yard was teeming with toys, playgrounds, and fun stuff. A man was in the yard, next to his sports car, watching his happy children play with their expensive toys. "Okay," this pastor thought, "They look like they aren't going to have any regard for Jesus." And sure enough, after talking with the man and asking, "Is there anything you feel this community needs." The man glanced at his house, his yard, his happy children and said, "Does it look like I need anything from the church?" That pastor then asked if there wasn't something missing, something absolutely necessary. "You obviously are very blessed. But as you watch your children play, don't you ever wonder if there was just something more that you could pass on to them? Something you haven't been able to give them?" The man paused and said, "You know there isn't a day that goes by that I don't worry about that." That was when Jesus was shared. Extraordinary claims were made. Life eternal was spoken of. The only real food was served. Real life was offered. That man tasted for the first time the only food that can do that.

This has always been God's invitation to the world. "*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*"² *Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*³ *Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.*" (Isaiah 55) That was quite an interesting section we read from Proverbs 9 earlier this morning, wasn't it? Wisdom was personified as making a house ready and setting out a table. Then wisdom invites people to come and eat the food that which has been prepared. She invites everyone, especially those who lack understanding and wisdom to come and eat. Jesus makes the invitation to us all, the Son of God himself says, "Here is food that you may eat and live. Its no ordinary food, it's real."

Bread is a fitting picture. It is freely prepared and offered to us from God, and we need it. It is absolutely necessary! Want to live? Come to Jesus for food. Stay hungry for it. For with it Jesus' promise is kept, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*" (Mt 5:6)