

Eating and Living!

(John 6:51 – 58)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus 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.' Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 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. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 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. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your fathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.'

Dear friends in Jesus,

A good friend of ours died before he reached the age of 50. Although he lived hundreds of kms from us, we were able to visit him occasionally while on holidays. For the last five days of his life he did not eat. Doctors said it would only aggravate his condition. It was obvious he was going to die soon, because he had no reserves on which to draw. When one does not eat, one cannot live.

The Gospel today is about eating and living. That is nothing new for the 6th chapter of John which recognises Jesus as ***'the bread of life'***. The chapter begins with Jesus feeding the 5,000 plus people. They were hungry and they needed bread to live. We all do. Yet throngs of people in this world do not get enough bread. Are we as concerned as Jesus was to give bread to the hungry?

Jesus was eager to give them other bread, too, that they might really live. But the people did not seem to be interested in this kind of bread. The only bread they seemed to know and understand was that which they had eaten the day before.

But there is much more to life than that; there is much more than this physical existence we live out here on earth. We get some idea of what Jesus meant when he says earlier in our chapter, ***Your ancestors ate manna in the desert and they died***. He was saying in effect, ***'I could feed you loaves and fish every day and fill you up, but it wouldn't give you real life'***. On the other hand he could say, ***'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever'***.

His hearers apparently misunderstood him. When he continued, ***'and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh'***, they argued among themselves saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" When Jesus said, ***'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life'***, he was trying to make it quite clear that it is he, in human form, who is the real bread of life. He gave himself – his flesh and blood on the cross of Calvary – for the life of the world.

It is to be completely dependent on him, to draw real life from him. It is to trust him completely as the only source of forgiveness and of eternal life.

A story is told of a man who seated himself under the Big Top at a circus, and waited for the aerial acts to begin. Minutes before the first act started, he was approached by a circus performer, who asked him if he could see the wire running from pole to pole near the top of the tent. 'Yes,' he answered, 'I can see it'. "In one of our acts", the circus performer told him, "someone is ridden across that wire on the handlebars of a bike. Do you believe it can be done?" 'Sure', he answered, 'I believe it'. A bit later he was asked the same question, and again he made the same answer. "Fine," said the circus performer, "we've selected you to ride on the handlebars".

Faith is put to the test when it is asked to surrender itself to another person. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus – to feed on the bread of life - is to be wholly dependent on him for real life and salvation.

This is what it means to eat his body and drink his blood in Holy Communion - to believe that Jesus died for us and rose again for us – so that when we receive his body and blood in the Sacrament, he is present with us to confirm to us that all our sins are really and truly forgiven, and that we are his precious children.

When a fire broke out in a family's house one night, a little boy was trapped in his upstairs bedroom. His father, who was outside, called him to come to his window. 'Jump', he cried out, 'and I'll catch you.' "But I can't see you", cried the boy. 'That doesn't make any difference', answered the father. 'I can see you; jump, and I'll catch you'. The boy jumped to safety. Faith in Jesus is something like that. Faith trusts that Jesus is constantly present with us, though we cannot see him, to give us life.

And what does it mean to live with Jesus? It means to live with him fully and forever NOW! Jesus says, ***'I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly'***. To live is to enjoy life fully with and under Jesus.

A missionary serving Jesus in an overseas country suffered the tragic death of his wife. Standing at the grave of his dear wife, he declared that if it were not for the resurrection of Jesus, he could not go on. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in him, though they die, will live forever. That was his constant comfort.

A little boy who had learned that God took a rib from Adam's side to make him a wife, developed a pain in his side. 'I think,' he said to his mother, 'that I'm going to have a wife'. If tomorrow brings pain, if the thought of death brings pain – to those who trust in Jesus, the pain is overcome by the assurance that we're going to have a REAL LIFE, LIFE ETERNAL with Jesus now and in heaven. AMEN.

PRAYER: Living heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus on his rescue mission, so that now we can live in him and he in us. let us always live in and with Jesus, so that, filled with your Spirit, we may know and do your will. Help us to live lives of thankfulness and praise, serving you and other precious people. **Amen.**

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck, 15 August 2021