

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John. It is not appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. In the LW three-year lectionary, the first part (51-58) is appointed on Pentecost 13B and the second part (60-69) for Pentecost 14B. Verse fifty-nine is left out of both readings. It's the verse that places the discourse at the synagogue in Capernaum.

This all began with The Feeding of the Five Thousand. The people who sought out Jesus to hear Him teach about God got hungry. He miraculously fed them, and they wanted more. They wanted to make Him a "Bread King," like others had bread kings, but He left them. They found Him, looking to get fed, because they were hungry again, and He knew that's why they came.

He redirects their focus away from earthly food, back towards the spiritual bread, and they want a piece of that. He identifies Himself as the Bread of Life, and tells them that if they want to live, they can only do that through Him. He tells them that He has in fact come down from heaven, and that He has the power and authority to raise up them and all things on the last day.

Hearing that He claimed to be bread from heaven, "the Jews murmured," confirming to one another that this was Joseph and Mary's boy and nothing special. He told them to stop murmuring, but read your Bibles; it's all there. He is the bread that is the fulfillment of manna, and able to do more than manna; He is the bread that brings eternal life.

I see that three years ago, I devoted a lot of words in the sermon to the Real Presence in the Sacrament. People want to know more about those things, and in this multi-denominational place they need to know about things like that. I went back to the (1215) Lateran Council, which made Transubstantiation official in the Church. The codification of that error is a good starting point.

After that, I then moved from there to the Reformation; the opening of a huge can of theological worms. Go to Marburg and tell that story, including Luther scratching out those Latin words on that wooden table with his knife. Modern nancified scholars, who cringe at the sight of a gun, who are scared of knives, make it a piece of chalk. You can hear that sermon on the Internet.

In teaching about the three main views on the real presence, I will invite the hearer – I'll use a white board if I have one, but preaching doesn't use visual aids – to picture four possible things

present in the Sacrament; bread, wine, body, blood. The Reformed believe the first two are there, but not the second pair. Rome believes just the opposite, and that's Transubstantiation.

The Lutherans believe that all four are there, in a sacramental, mysterious way that is probably not completely understandable to the human mind. The question put to Jesus here (52) is the same put to Lutherans; the question is framed by the adverb "How?" How can this be. The Lutherans don't claim to know exactly how this happened, but we do claim that it does.

So what's the big deal anyway? That's what people are thinking, even if they aren't saying it.

I don't know why that line's there, but I can't get rid of it. Here's what I said three years ago.

And so, what's the big deal, anyway?

Fundamentally, some of us still believe that some things are true and others are not. John talks a lot about "truth" and Jesus says of Himself that He is "the way, the truth, and the life."

The Big Deal? Well, Jesus seems to think that it's a big deal that people know and understand that He is giving His flesh to us **"for the life of the world"** and that's a big deal.

Paul and the other writers seem to think it's a big deal. In 1 Corinthians 11:29, he says **"anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body – of Jesus – eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died."**

It's a big deal because a Jesus who finds Himself limited to being present "at the right hand of God" is not a Jesus who is God, and a Jesus who is God is unable to save us from our sin, and that's a fairly large deal.

But He does.

Textual Notes

51. And one more time, tying it all together, "ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς – I am the living bread that has come down from heaven." He calls Himself "I am," and He calls Himself "bread," for the first time adding the adjective "living," which is different from calling oneself "the Bread of Life."

Everybody knows that bread is not living. I learned early on in school to distinguish between animate and inanimate objects, and bread is not animate. It does not breathe, or move, or consume food, or any of the things we associate with life, and like the manna in the wilderness, it is susceptible to decay and can be broken down by the body to be used as food.

He continues, “ἐάν τις φάγη ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ἄρτου, ζήσκει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – If anyone should eat from this bread, he will live eternally.” And as if there’s any doubt about what He’s talking about, “καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ἡ σὰρξ μου – the bread I give is my flesh.” So the bread is living, and it’s to be consumed as food, and it gives eternal life.

When He talks about giving His flesh, He’s talking primarily about the cross, where He gives His very flesh “ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς – for the life of the world.” It is consistent in John that the same world who treat Him so poorly are the same world for whom He goes to the cross, to save them and get for them eternal life. Those words cause the “murmuring” to escalate.

52. The word describing the interaction of “The Jews” in response to what Jesus says here is “μάχομαι – to fight,” a rare word, occurring only four times in the NT. It means that they were really going after it. In Acts (7:26), the word is found in the mouth of Stephan as he relates how two Hebrew slaves were arguing and one man pushed the other man.

In his second letter to him, Paul tells Timothy (2:24) that a pastor can’t do that. Clearly, pastors can and are obligated to argue, debate, persuade, and contend for the faith, but don’t do this. James (4:2) broadens the rule, telling his readers not to do this, finding its root in jealousy and greed. So the words of Jesus here caused that among “the Jews.”

John describes how they frame the issue, “Ἐμάχοντο οὖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι λέγοντες Πῶς δύναται οὗτος ἡμῖν δοῦναι τὴν σάρκα αὐτοῦ φαγεῖν – the Jews were there fighting among themselves, saying ‘how does He have power to give to us the flesh of Him to eat?’” NA includes the possessive “αὐτοῦ - of Him,” but some manuscripts omit it.

Perusing the Apparatus in Nestle-Aland 26, I am reminded that you don’t have to be an Apparatus Wonk to be a Pastor, but you should know how to use it. A quick perusal of it in this case reveals that – in general terms – the older manuscripts include the possessive, and the newer ones omit it. The very important Papyrus 66 includes it.

I don’t know if you knew this, but WIK has an entire article on P66. Among other things, it came from Egypt, and it includes almost the entire text of John. What probably happened is that later copyists thought it redundant – there is no doubt that Jesus is talking here about His flesh, as opposed to generic flesh – so they saved a little ink.

We note that these hearers know exactly what Jesus is saying. They just don’t know quite what to make of it, and how would you? Even a lot of Christians don’t know what to make

of it, and many of them, beginning with Zwingli, simply flee to later words (63) to forget about it, and this after two millennia of the development of Christian Theology!

53 – 54. These verses have been somewhat disputed. There is a school of thought who teach that the verse teaches that one who has professed Christ, but has not received the Sacrament at some point in his life, that person cannot go to heaven. The other school of thought teaches that the verse does not teach that, and they are correct.

Firstly, and most obviously, the person who has professed Christ will also partake of the Sacrament. The Black Swan Argument declares that just because we don't know of Christians who haven't, it doesn't mean there aren't. There may be Christians who don't partake of the Sacrament. Actually, you probably wouldn't have to try very hard to find such Christians.

The Christians who are not going to church are not going to Communion. There are a lot of reasons why Christians stop going to church, and rejecting and forsaking the Faith is one of them. Most of the people I know who have stopped going to church and receiving Communion have not rejected or forsaken the Faith. Some of them have, but most have not.

Another category of Christians who are not going to Communion is those who go to church, but who abstain, and I don't know many Lutherans like that, but I'm sure they are out there; nobody is forced to go either to church or to Communion. Some Christians are victims of bad shepherding and don't know the benefits of Communion, so why bother? But they still profess Christ.

Churches like the Quakers and Salvation Army don't offer Communion, and they are not the only ones. Google "Churches don't communion" and see for yourself. I've been telling people for years that "The Evangelicals" are not really about doctrines and beliefs, and they are certainly not about the Sacraments. If you are "Evangelical," you can believe and do just about anything.

Why should it surprise us when they don't do – or when they limit – Communion? For many of them, Communion is seen as a distraction from the music, and the lights, and the clapping, and the highly emotional public speaker. It can also be a logistical problem, but they can look to LCMS Youth Gatherings for the model of efficient distribution.

Secondly, the double entendre says that the real issue for Christians is that one is a Christian, whatever metaphor you use to describe conversion and the Christian life; eating of the flesh of Christ is what Christians do as a matter of course. This includes listening to the Word, putting it into action in your life, living a life of reflection and repentance, as well as receiving the Sacrament.

55. The reason why such is the case is stated "ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ μου ἀληθὴς ἐστὶν βρῶσις, καὶ τὸ αἷμά μου ἀληθὴς ἐστὶν πόσις – for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." The adjective "ἀληθὴς – true" is all over the place in John. So is the opposite, and John is very cut and dried, very black and white, very either/or; a thing is either true or it's false.

The noun “ἀλήθεια – truth” occurs one hundred nine times in the NT. The adjective “ἀληθής – true” is less common, occurring twenty-six times in the NT. Both are from the verb “λανθάνω – hidden” with a negator; actually the opposite of “hidden” or “concealed.”

Something that had been hidden has been revealed, an interesting way to think of truth.

Whatever truth you’re talking about, that truth is out there somewhere. It’s out there, and we know a lot of it, and we know more of it all the time, but there’s a lot of truth out there we do not know about. By definition, we don’t even know what we don’t know, as Rummy so eloquently explained to us during the Administration of Bush II.

KJV uses the word “indeed,” and several LBT follow suit, and others use “real,” which is the same word used in the teaching term “Real Presence.” Several actually have the correct word; “true,” which means that the food and drink given to is the revelation of God among us, and the idea that this is not sacramental is ludicrous.

56. We have spoken before about the idea that hunger and thirst are not one-time things, but in fact they repeat continually for as long as you live, and when you lose your appetite, you’re probably sick, and if you’re not eating, you will die. We get hungry, we eat, we are satisfied for a time, and when you get thirsty, you drink, and your thirst is for a time satisfied.

With that in mind, we hear Jesus say that, “ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτῷ – the one eating my flesh and drinking my blood abides in me and I in him.” It means that in order to remain a Christian, the Christian has to be fed on Christ, and if you aren’t, then that’s not a good thing, and you should come to church.

The verb “μένει – he abides” is a common word, appearing one hundred eighteen times in the NT. The primary meaning is of remaining at a physical location, and one could make the application that the place to be is at church. More to the point, the secondary meaning of the word is to stay alive and to not die, and you should come to church.

57. He speaks words of life, “καθὼς ἀπέστειλén με ὁ ζῶν Πατήρ καὶ ἐγὼ ζῶ διὰ τὸν Πατέρα – as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father.” Here we hear the eternal Son using the language of apostleship to note that the Father sent Him, noting that the Father is alive, as is the Son, Who gives life and Who is the life of the world.

He notes also that “καὶ ὁ τρώγων με καὶ ἐμὸς ζήσῃ δι’ ἐμέ – and the one feeding on me will live because of me.” Exactly what does that mean, to “feed” on Him? It’s a participle, continuous action, back to the hunger and eating cycle. We are eating to live, and we are feeding on Him so that we live forever.

58. He comes back once more to the wilderness wanderings and manna, once again comparing and contrasting that to this. To explain a thing by contrasting and comparing it with another thing that

is not that thing is a common teaching method of good teachers, and appeals to the brain of man by using logic; the science of correct thinking.

We do that all the time. Children very early on learn to compare and contrast different foods. When they get to school they compare and contrast teachers, other students, and the parents of those students. All cars are the same, but all cars are different. People are people, and they are all different in many different ways.

The manna that came down from the sky gave life, and so does Jesus the Bread of Life; they are similar things, but different. The primary difference between these similar breads is profound, and expressed thusly; those who ate that bread eventually dies, but “ὁ τρώγων τοῦτον τὸν ἄρτον ζήσκει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – the one eating this bread will live into eternity.”

Lazarus; he died, and he was resurrected, but he died again. The one who eats of Jesus the Bread of Life will live forever and not see the second death. This entire discussion is about the masses wanting to get bread so that they can live, and Jesus wanting them to elevate their expectations of Him; He can do that, and He can do more than that.

59. And now this bombshell; “Ταῦτα εἶπεν ἐν συναγωγῇ διδάσκων ἐν Καφαρναούμ – these things He said, teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.” It was familiar territory, the home of several Apostles and not far from Nazareth. At this point in His Ministry, Jesus is still allowed into the synagogue; later He will be booted out.

Likewise, the Apostles were, for a time, allowed into the synagogue, but not after they began to proclaim Jesus as Messiah. The first Christians were for a time allowed, but later booted for believing what the Apostles proclaimed. These days, how far do you think a Jewish person would get into the synagogue if he were believing like that?

60. The response of “Πολλοὶ – many” people is “Σκληρὸς ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος οὗτος· τίς δύναται αὐτοῦ ἀκούειν – this Word is hard, who is able to hear?” These words coming from many of “τῶν μαθητῶν – the disciples,” people who – distinct from the masses – have on some level bought into Jesus and are in some way devoted to Him and His teachings.

Given our contemporary situation, it’s not hard to understand how such a state of mind might exist in many of those people. As noted previously, we have been listening to – and talking about the meaning of – these words of Jesus. For them, this was a new thing, and to get one’s head around its meaning is not easy.

I keep telling people that it’s okay not to understand everything about God. New things about God are especially often not easily understood or easily misunderstood. And even after those two thousand years, and even after all that ink spilled and knives scrawling on wooden tables, what is the meaning of Jesus the Bread of Life and the Real Presence?

I know, and I know that there's a lot I don't know about that and about other things. We keep eating, and we keep drinking, and we keep partaking of Jesus, and we look back and see that I understand a lot more than I used to. It helps if you devote time to be in the Word, like I do every Tuesday morning for – going on four hours now.

The words He has been saying, Jesus acknowledges, are “σκληρός – hard.” The word is used six times in the NT, and it means that something is strong and unbending, and the application of this verse is not the Lutherans who don't come to church, but to those who deny that Jesus is the Bread of Life, who deny the Real Presence of Jesus in the Sacrament and are repelled by such an idea.

61. Like “The Jews” before them, the disciples of Jesus now find themselves “γογγύζουσιν περὶ τούτου – grumbling about this.” I'm surprised that the verb occurs only eight times in the NT, four in John, three of those four in this chapter. They were talking among themselves, and the verb often indicates maliciousness, but here I don't think so.

What it means here is that they were thinking of packing it in and jumping off the Jesus train, which becomes clear when He says to them “Τοῦτο ὑμᾶς σκανδαλίζει – this offends you?” The question expects neither a positive nor negative answer, and He seems surprised that His preaching would cause them to lose their faith.

Recall how this whole thing got started; Jesus fed 5,000, then He crossed the Sea sans boat, then the crowds followed Him and wanted Him to feed them, then He started to talk about this. On a very base level, the people still have not been fed, and are still hungry. Hungry people are generally people who are not in the best of moods.

But there's more than just hunger going on here. On another level, perhaps these hungry people wished The Guy would stop talking so much about Himself and just feed them already. You know He can. But to cut straight to the heart of the matter, Jesus was making Himself out to be Somebody Special, and not all were buying it.

By way of review; the verb “σκανδαλίζ” occurs twenty-six times in the NT. The word “offended” is preferred by the translations, a word that means nothing in the vernacular, and the Greek word means more like “to lose one's faith.” It's what miracles do; believers believe them, and unbelievers don't.

As noted previously, several times John has a “division” occurring among the Jews about Jesus. When Paul goes out with the Word, there are always some who believe the miracle of the Resurrection, and those who don't. In the same way these days, some believe things about Jesus and others opt out. Some Christians accept the Real Presence; others don't.

62. Sometimes I think Jesus is messing with them. But He's not. He's actually going back to the thought expressed by Him that He is the bread that has come down from heaven, asking “ἐὰν οὖν

θεωρῆτε τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀναβαίνοντα ὅπου ἦν τὸ πρότερον – what if you were to see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before?”

They are having a hard time understanding the bread thing, and we get that, but that’s no reason to leave, is it? The hypothetical, presented here using the conjunction “ἐὰν – what if” and the subjunctive mode, harkens back to His words about His heavenly origins, and asks them if they would retain their faith if they were to see something like that.

63. He does not wait for an answer, and I would call this a rhetorical question, except that the answer is not obvious. He continues, telling them that “τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιῶν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν – the Spirit is giving life, the flesh given nothing beneficial.” The comparison is between the Holy Spirit and human flesh.

Let’s unpack this, shall we. Given that this whole discourse is about earthly and heavenly bread sustaining earthly and heavenly life, the point of comparison is between the physical and the spiritual. Good hyperbole is easy to spot, like it is here. To say that human flesh is absolutely useless is hyperbole.

But if you’re going to compare what we mean by the theological term “the flesh” with the term “the spirit,” then there is nothing good in the flesh. Double entendre is all over the place in John, and that appears to be what’s going on here; the flesh is His body, and the Spirit is Holy, and at the same time flesh and Spirit do battle within the Christian.

This verse is famously used by Calvinists and Protestants – and especially spiritual people – as a proof-text against the Real Presence. That’s silly. Why would one want to manipulate a Bible verse to “prove” that nothing is going on in the Sacrament? Most often because that person doubts miraculous things, or thinks that it’s all about, or to emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit.

Surprisingly, the people who understand the Spirit to work through Word and Sacrament are seen as not having an appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit. As we believe, teach, and confess, the bread in the Sacrament is indeed just earthly bread. Until we add the Word to it, at which point it becomes also the body of Jesus.

The wine also at that point and because of those words becomes the blood of Jesus. The Deniers don’t believe that, and many of them think of themselves to be very spiritual, in part because of that denial. To summarize; the bread without the Word is just bread, but with the Word added, it is a Sacrament.

And Jesus, as well as Luther, makes that connection, saying “τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστιν – the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit, and they are life.” The noun is plural; the subject is “the words” He has been saying. The verb is in the perfect tense, said in the past, their effect continue to the present, and into the future.

The effects of the words of Jesus have over the years been the means to make many Christians, and they continue to make many Christians to this day. The particular words added to bread and wine have made that bread and wine to be a sustaining, nourishing, life-giving food to those Christians for two millennia. Those words “are life” for us.

64. The problem, as we noted, is now explicitly noted by Jesus; “ἀλλ’ εἰσὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν τινες οἳ οὐ πιστεύουσιν – but there are certain of you who are not believing.” Jesus has known this all along, just like every Pastor knows it all along; of those you Baptize, of those you Confirm, whether child or adult, some of them will fall away.

He has also known about Judas; “ἦδει γὰρ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὁ Ἰησοῦς τίνες εἰσὶν οἳ μὴ πιστεύοντες καὶ τίς ἐστὶν ὁ παραδόντων αὐτόν – for from the beginning Jesus had known that certain were not believing, and who will be betraying Him.” He knew some would stop believing, and He knew about Judas because He was God, and because the OT spoke of him.

65. He refers back now to a previous statement (v. 44) about the Father converting them and then handing them over to Him. Throughout this discourse, in many and various ways, Jesus has taught a strict Monergism. Microsoft Word, as usual, does not recognize that Christian term, but WIK has a very good article on it, the reason why WIK flourishes and Encarta is defunct.

66. Our teaching of strict Monergism is also seen by some Lutheran Pastors as the reason why people stop coming to church. Indeed, “Ἐκ τούτου πολλοὶ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἀπῆλθον εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ οὐκέτι μετ’ αὐτοῦ περιεπάτουν – upon this, many out of His disciples departed to the back and no longer walked with Him.”

Unless it’s an idiom, the term “to the back” seems to mean not that they went to the back of the crowd, but that they did not walk alongside of Jesus; they left Him. A.T. Robertson is my go-to guy for idioms, and he doesn’t see one here, but he did remind me that this incident took place inside the synagogue, and he rightly says;

The crisis had come. These half-hearted seekers after the loaves and fishes and political power turned abruptly from Jesus, walked out of the synagogue with a deal of bluster and were walking with Jesus no more. Jesus had completely disillusioned these hungry camp-followers who did not care for spiritual manna that consisted in intimate appropriation of the life of Jesus as God's Son.

Lutheran preachers like to use this verse as a proof-text for why people stop coming to church. People, they say, stop coming to church because I’m so confessional and so sacramental and well, so darned orthodox. Me and Jesus, they say, have the same problem for the same reason, so it’s a good problem to have, and those people were just not very good Christians to begin with.

Motives are always mixed, and there are several reasons why people stop coming to church, and sometimes the pastor’s orthodoxy may be a factor. Things like work schedules, family life, habit,

personal problems, and simple apathy are certainly among the reasons why people stop coming to church, and there's not really much a pastor can do about those things.

Things that the pastor can control are his interactions with parishioners. One time a pastor told me that people kept telling him that he was not a very nice person. After a while he concluded that he maybe needed to work on that. The congregation sent him to a class to work on being nicer. Knowing the guy, I'd hate to have known him before the class. Maybe it wasn't a very good class.

Mr. Broken Record says that people like to come to church when Sunday morning is meaningful and well-done. I know, I know, God's Word in and of itself is meaningful, but how is it that so many preachers make it seem rote and routine? Somehow, they manage to take a very interesting God and make Him seem uninteresting, or even boring.

Good preaching, a good liturgy well-done, friendly faces, and no drama all work to make people want to come to church, and maybe they'll even make a schedule change to make that happen, and don't forget that old proverb "you attract more flies with honey than with vinegar." I didn't say it's in the Bible; I said it was a proverb, appearing in America in the 1744 *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

67. Coming back now to His Homes, "εἶπεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῖς δώδεκα Μὴ καὶ ὑμεῖς θέλετε ὑπάγειν – Jesus therefore said to the Twelve 'do you not also want to go away?'" In contrast to the comers and goers who seem almost randomly and with a great deal of fickleness to flit here and there around Jesus, and then there are the disciples.

These are the twelve hand-picked and chosen by Jesus to carry on His work after His departure. They have been with Him since the beginning, and they have heard and seen it all. They have even already been sent out into the mission field, and know what it's like out there. The Μὴ expects a negative answer from them, and He gets it.

68. Peter steps up, rhetorically asking, "Κύριε, πρὸς τίνα ἀπελευσόμεθα – Lord, to whom shall we go," pointing out "ῥήματα ζωῆς αἰωνίου ἔχεις – you have the words of eternal life." On one level, these twelve are invested in Jesus; They gave up all for Him. On another level, where else would they go, and whom else would they follow, if not Him. They believe His words about Himself.

DS I and DS II in LSB have these words as the Gospel Responsory.

69. In fact, they make a fine confession of faith, saying "καὶ ἡμεῖς πεπιστεύκαμεν καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ Ἅγιος τοῦ Θεοῦ – we have been believing and knowing that you are the Holy One of God." Both of those verbs are in the perfect tense; their confession is that their belief and knowledge have been ongoing and continues.

I find it interesting that the verbs "to trust" and "to know" are placed next to one another in this context. The answer to the question of whether the Christian religion is a matter of faith or a matter

of knowledge is “both.” That, and here “to know” Jesus means to know His identity as Who He says He is, another double entendre, and they ‘re all over the place in John.

Hymns

LSB 625 – Lord Jesus Christ, Life-Giving Bread

LSB 621 – Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent

LSB 642 – O Living Bread from Heaven

LSB 629 – What Is This Bread