

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John. It is not appointed to be read on any Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. In the LW three-year lectionary, the first part (51-58) is appointed to be read on Pentecost 13B and the second part (60-69) is read on Pentecost 14B. Verse fifty-nine is left out of both readings. It's the verse that places location of 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 say that 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 that He was most certainly nothing special. He told them to stop their murmuring and instead 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.

Six years ago, I devoted a lot of words in the sermon to the idea of 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 Karen 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 it’s called “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; and 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 because it says so.

Textual Notes

51. Up to this point, He has been talking about the bread (food) that comes down from heaven, the one He calls “the bread of life,” meaning Himself, “I am.” He repeats His identity as God, and for the first time adds a present participle that further describes that bread as being alive, “ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς – I am the living bread that has come down from heaven.”

Everybody knows that bread is not alive or living. I learned early on in school to distinguish between animate and inanimate objects, and bread is an inanimate object. It does not breath, 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.

Jesus, who is the Bread of Life, is clearly alive, unlike common bread and unlike the manna that also came down from heaven, and He continues, “ἐάν τις φάγη ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ἄρτου, ζήσκει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – If anyone should eat from this bread, he will live eternally.” He is alive, and after He dies, He rises and lives to eternity, and if you are with Him, you too will die and then live eternally.

We have noted before that the function of bread – the word can mean food in the wider sense – is to sustain life in living things, including humans. When He says, “καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ἡ σὰρξ μου – the bread I give is my flesh,” He is telling us that He is the one who will sustain spiritual life in those who partake of Him. The living bread is consumed, and it gives to us eternal life.

When He talks about giving His flesh, He’s talking primarily about the cross, where He gives His very flesh “ἐστιν 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 very 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 opponents of Jesus began to fight with themselves, “Ἐμάχοντο οὖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι λέγοντες Πῶς δύναται οὗτος ἡμῖν δοῦναι τὴν σάρκα φαγεῖν – the Jews were

there fighting among themselves, saying, ‘How does He have ower to give to is the flesh of Him to eat?’ NA includes the possessive “αὐτοῦ - of Him.” 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. Papyrus 66, which includes almost all of John, includes it.

The word describing the interaction of “The Jews” with self, reacting to Jesus 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 the true story of two Hebrew slaves who were arguing, and one man pushed the other man.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul tells him (2:24) that it’s a thing a pastor can’t do. 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.”

Like many modern hearers, these hearers know exactly what Jesus is saying about Himself. 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 even the better (older) commentators struggle with the meaning of it.

53. Continuing, “εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε τὴν σάρκα τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πίνητε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖ – so Jesus said to them, ‘truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink of the blood, you don’t have life in you.’” He means that if you are not a Christian, then you are dead man walking.

54. On the plus side, “ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον, καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ – the one eating my flesh and drinking my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” He means that if you are a Christian, then even though you die, He will raise you up from the dead – like He will Lazarus – and you will live forever.

The bottom line for Christians and others is that – whatever metaphor you use – you are a Christian and are going to heaven or you are not a Christian and you are not. Christians depend on Jesus to sustain them spiritually, and He does that by listening to the Word, putting it into action in your life, living a life of reflection and repentance, as well as receiving the Sacrament of the Altar.

Receiving Jesus, the Bread of Life metaphorically and receiving it really in the Sacrament are two ideas not opposed to, but complimentary of one another. People who are Christians regularly

receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Sacrament, which takes place in the Church. For Christians to go to Divine Service in the Church and not receive the Sacrament is an anomaly.

We need look no further than our own Lutheran history, to the time when the Christian was not likely to find the Sacrament in Church on most Sundays. It was offered quarterly – I think because the Confessions say that if you don't receive Communion at least four times a year, you are not to be considered a Christian, and Lutherans want to be considered Christians – in most churches.

I was once told that the New Years' Eve Service was there so that if you missed a communion, you could "make it up," get your four in before the end of the year, still be considered to be a Christian. We don't do that, and if anybody asks about it – they don't anymore – I tell them that we certainly could observe the Circumcision of Jesus, the appointed theme of the day.

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 “ἀληθής – 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 and genuine, 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.” Some factual thing that had been hidden has been revealed, and new truths are revealed to us every day of our lives.

Whatever truth you're talking about, that truth exists, and it's out there somewhere. I'm reading Michael Kurlansky's book *Salmon*, and I'm learning a lot about that particular fish, and most of what I know about Cod is from his previous book with another one-word title. Those things I now know about those two fish have always been knowable, but I had to read about them to know them.

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,” a Lutheran term. Several translations use the word “true.” The preacher ought to explain that the word 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 eventually die. We get hungry, we eat, we are satisfied or 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 remains in me and I in him.”

The verbs “eating” and “drinking” are present participles, and 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.

The verb “μένει – he abides” is a common word, appearing one hundred eighteen times in the NT, and it’s a good thing to remain with Jesus. 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 and living, “καθὼς ἀπέστειλén με ὁ ζῶν Πατήρ καὶ γὼ ζῶ διὰ τὸν Πατέρα, καὶ ὁ τρώγων με καὶ κεῖνος ζήσκει δι’ ἐμέ – as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me will live because of me.” He uses the language of apostlehood to note that the Father sent the Son to be spiritual food for the eternal Christian.

58. He circles back once more to the wilderness wanderings and manna, once again comparing and contrasting that to this. They are in some ways similar; the manna came down from the sky and gave life, and so does Jesus the Bread of Life come from heaven and give life. But they are in other ways different, and the difference is profound. You eat the one – manna – you still die.

You eat the other, and “ὁ τρώγων τοῦτον τὸν ἄρτον ζήσκει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – the one eating this bread will live into eternity.” Lazarus died, and he was resurrected, but he died again. Presumably Lazarus will be among those raised up on the last day. The one who eats of Jesus the Bread of Life will live forever and not see “the second death,” and that’s better than just mere bread. .

59. And only now do we find out that; “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; and He is there actually preaching a sermon. Later He will be booted out.

Likewise, the Apostles were, for a time, would be allowed and even welcomed into the synagogue, but not after they began to proclaim Jesus as Messiah. The first Christians were for a time allowed to worship there, 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 to the sermon is “Πολλοὶ οὖν ἀκούσαντες ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ εἶπαν Σκληρὸς ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος οὗτος· τίς δύναται αὐτοῦ ἀκούειν – many from His disciples, hearing said, ‘This is a hard saying. Who is able to understand it?’” So that’s not a new thing. Those admitting that they are having a hard time understanding what those words mean are “disciples,” not the masses.

They are followers of Jesus, wanting to learn from Him. This sermon has been around for nearly two millennia, and Christians still struggle with what it means. For them, this talk of Jesus as

Bread was a new thing, and to get one's head around its meaning could not have been easy, and it wasn't. I tell people that it's okay to not understand or expect to understand everything about God.

The words He has been saying, Jesus acknowledges, are “σκληρός – hard.” That 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 to 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. It seems like people were always grumbling about something Jesus did or said. Two of them are Paul noting how Israel grumbled in the Wilderness.

They were talking among themselves, and I don't think they were being malicious, and doesn't appear that Jesus thinks so either. It means that they were thinking of and talking about packing it in and jumping off the Jesus train, which becomes clear when He says to them “Τοῦτο ὑμᾶς σκανδαλίζει – this causes you to lose your faith?” They must think the sermon was sacramental.

By way of review, the verb “σκανδαλίζ” occurs twenty-six times in the NT. The word “offended” is preferred by the translations. That's a word that means nothing in the current vernacular, and when it's used to refer to Christians, the Greek word means more like “to lose one's faith.” They do not express to Jesus that His words are causing them to doubt, but He picks up on it.

The question posed to them by Him expects neither a positive nor negative answer, and He seems genuinely surprised that His preaching would cause them to consider forsaking The Faith. Jesus indeed thinks that He is something special, another idea old to us but novel to them, and as we are about to see, not all of them never actually left Him. But a large number of them did.

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, and it's a problem.

62. He circles back now to the idea expressed by Him earlier (33) that He is the bread that has come down from heaven, asking “ἐὰν οὖν θεωρῇτε 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?” It's put to them as a hypothetical, and He already knows that the Ascension will one day be a reality.

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 ζωοποιοῦν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ

ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν – the Spirit is giving life, the flesh gives nothing beneficial.” He juxtaposes the spiritual with the physical, and notes that “the spirit” is giving life, but “the flesh” cannot.

Given that this whole discourse is about earthly bread sustaining earthly life and heavenly bread sustaining heavenly life, of those two the most important is eternal life in heaven, and 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. The flesh is corrupt, and Jesus takes flesh upon Himself.

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 me, or to emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit.

Surprisingly, the people who understand the Spirit to work mightily 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, and earthly wine becomes also the blood of Jesus.

The Deniers of the Real Presence don’t believe that, and many of them think of themselves to be very spiritual, in part because of that denial. It’s the meaning of Jesus 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” that He has been saying to them.

The verb is in the perfect tense, said in the past, their effect continues to the present, and will continue into the future. Indeed, the effects of the words of Jesus have over the years been the means to make many people into Christians, and they continue to make many Christians to this day. People don’t become Christians because they see that Christians are better people.

Sometimes they are, and that may get the attention of an unbeliever, but the Word is what makes Christians. Often, it’s the word added to water to make Christian, Trinitarian Baptism. The particular words added to bread and wine have made that bread and wine to be a sustaining, nourishing, lifegiving 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 οἱ 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 and no longer believe, and there’s only so much you can do.

He has also known all along about Judas; “ἦδει γὰρ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὁ Ἰησοῦς τινες εἰσὶν οἱ μὴ πιστεύοντες καὶ τίς ἐστιν ὁ παραδώσων αὐτόν – for from the beginning Jesus had known that certain were not

believing, and who will be betraying Him.” He probably knew exactly who of them 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, and that’s the reason why WIK flourishes and Encarta is defunct.

66. He calls it, and then, “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 completely.

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. Other things like work schedules, family life, habit, personal problems, moving to a new town, and simple apathy et al are 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 maybe he 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.

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, routine, even boring? One congregation had a guy like that. He left and they got somebody else and one of the members said in a meeting, “we like coming to church again.” That’s a good thing.

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, who believe and want to learn, but still....

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 they know what it's like out there. Will you leave also? The Μὴ that begins the question 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 continuing, and the effect of it will continue into the future.

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