

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 14

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Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

Got a better offer?

—John 6:60-69

700 years before Christ God said to his people through the Prophet Isaiah, “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. 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” (Isaiah 55:1,2). When the Son of God walked the earth, Jesus told this parable: The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants and said, “Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet” (Matthew 22:1-4, adapt.). Think of all the powerful messages communicated by the imagery of food. Food is life; it nourishes and sustains us, and we cannot remain alive without it. Food is comfort; we even speak of “comfort food.” Food is joy, togetherness, family; a delicious meal around a holiday table with people we love. Food is peace and contentment; even the aroma of cooking and baking brings back fond memories of happy times. Food is such a big part of our lives, it's no wonder that God uses this powerful imagery to describe our relationship with him and the blessings we enjoy from him. Over and over throughout the pages of Scripture God holds out this offer: Eat and live!

John chapter 6 is the ultimate invitation to dine, where Jesus invites us to feast on him. To eat Jesus' flesh and to drink Jesus' blood is simply to believe in him as our Lord and Savior, to eat the Amen and dine on the I AM. It is the best meal ever. He fills us with all his goodness, so that we are what we eat, and we become like Jesus and enjoy all the good things that he is and all that he brings. He invites you to eat the Bread of Life and live forever. You got a better offer?

The crowds in the synagogue in Capernaum that day found Jesus' words hard to swallow. He told them they were looking for the wrong kind of earthly food—stuff that perishes and leaves us hungry—and he encouraged them to feed on him, the Bread of Life. The manna their forefathers ate with Moses kept them alive in the wilderness and brought them to the Promised Land, but they still died. Now the Son of God himself walked among them, and Jesus offered himself, the Bread of Life. He invited people to feed on him, to repent of their sins and trust in him—again, that's what it means to eat the Bread of Life— and he promised, “He who feeds on this bread will live forever.” And the reaction? *On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching? Who can accept it?”*

What's so hard about Jesus' teaching? Trust Jesus and live forever—what's so hard about that? Let me tell you why the teaching of Jesus is so hard for human ears to hear and for human mouths to swallow. To trust in Jesus and in Jesus alone is to completely despair of self. It is to let go of ourselves, everything we value about ourselves, everything we think makes us important or worthwhile, and to completely lose the idea that we have something to offer God. To repent of our sins is to recognize and embrace the truth that we are naturally wretched, wicked, blind, lost, steeped in sin, and under God's wrath. It is to recognize that we are hopeless and helpless without Jesus. There is nothing we can offer, nothing we can pay, no good work we can perform, no choice we can make, not even any good intentions we can muster that will feed our soul and get us one inch closer to God. Jesus' teaching is hard because fighting against the truth that Jesus and Jesus alone can save us are our ego, our pride, our refusal to admit we're wrong, our deluded opinion that there's got to be something about me that makes God happy with me, the idea that we can do or contribute something to our own saving. Jesus' teaching is hard because it's all about Jesus, and I naturally want it to be just a little bit about me.

But it's still Jesus who holds out the gift of life: *Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”* There are times in a negotiation when there's really no negotiation. One of the parties in the deal holds all the cards, one side has everything to offer, and he lays it all out on the table. No conditions. No strings attached. The offer is sweet, so excellent, that only a fool would walk away from such a good deal. Jesus offers life: Eat and live forever. You got a better offer?

Sometimes we might think we can find a better offer. Satan, the mortal enemy of our souls, dangles what look like juicy, delectable morsels in front of us, and he tempts us to swallow them. But it's the classic bait and switch. He serves up deadly poison in the form of attractive, tasty goodies. Eve saw that the tree in the Garden of Eden *looked* good and desirable for gaining knowledge, so she ate. It *looks* like indulging personal, carnal desires is so much better than following Jesus. It *looks* like having the approval and acceptance of my peers is better than

following Jesus. It *looks* like living life unfettered, unrestrained by such quaint, outdated things like morality and obedience is so much better than walking the narrow path. Satan, the liar, is more than happy to paint a seductive, attractive picture of all the tasty snacks, worldly pleasure, self-indulgence—a personal pleasure package, specifically crafted for you to seduce and draw you in. He'll appeal to your intellect, to your reason, to your skepticism, to your lusts, to your greed, to your envy—whatever it will take to get you to think that there's a better offer out there than what Jesus offers. *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* If Jesus wasn't going to feed their bellies and meet their perceived needs and solve their problems on their terms, they would look elsewhere to find a better offer.

So how do you feel when you've gotten everything ready for the party, you've prepared the hors d'oeuvre, set the table with the best china and silverware, prepared a several-course meal, rolled out the red carpet—and people aren't interested in your invitation? I wonder how the Lord God feels when his grace is despised, when his love is spurned, when everything that is good is met with contempt and disdain. I wonder how the Lord Jesus felt as he watched the crowds turn away because the Bread of Life didn't suit their palate. How does it grieve the Holy Spirit when we leave the things of God and wander off to sample the empty delights of the world? I wonder what tone was in Jesus' voice as he turned to the Twelve and asked, "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" Do you have a better offer?

It was Simon Peter who replied to Jesus' heartfelt question: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life? We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*" There isn't a better offer. Jesus is the only Way, the Truth, and the Life. Apart from the name of Jesus there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved. He offers, promises, and delivers the one thing no one else can offer. He gives us eternal life. His offer is unconditional. The offer Jesus holds out to sinners is the sweetest offer of pure grace. Jesus gives his flesh for the life of the world; the world does nothing. Jesus sheds his blood to make sinners clean; the sinners do nothing. The Father gives his Son, and the Son gives his life on the cross. The Spirit brings us to the Son and gives us life through the Son. It is such a sweet deal. There is no negotiating necessary or possible. There is no give-and-take. Salvation, the forgiveness of sins, peace with God—it is a gift, a free gift, from God's love to you, bought for us by the precious blood of Jesus, who with his own innocent suffering and death, has rescued us from death and eternal darkness and gives us life and immortality. He feeds our souls, and he satisfies us. He invites us to his table, and he forgives us. He seats us at his banquet, and he serves us. It's all by grace. It's all free. Peace, joy, fulfillment, hope, comfort, confidence, a foundation for this life, a perfect union with the Jesus and an ecstatic reunion with our loved ones in heaven. There isn't a better offer!

Some of the people in Capernaum left Jesus that day, and they never returned. They refused the Bread of Life, and they finished their days starving in a spiritual wasteland, lost forever. Some of the people who left that day did return; there's an interesting Christian tradition written in the writings of the early church that the Evangelist Luke was one of those who walked away from Jesus at Capernaum but later repented and again walked with Jesus. Those who returned to follow Christ realized that nothing else satisfied the hunger of their souls. Friends, there are days when we think we don't need Jesus. There are times when we feel more drawn to other things, when Jesus becomes an afterthought. There are times when we want to turn away and leave the Lord. Whenever you find yourself feeling that way, repent of those wicked thoughts and return to Jesus; he'll welcome you back with open arms. And as you make your way through this pilgrimage called life, feed on Jesus. Trust in him for the forgiveness of sins. Devour his Word, read your Scriptures—Jesus' words are spirit and they are life—cherish your devotional time with him, feed your soul. He invites you regularly to feed on him at his Table, as in Communion you receive the true body and blood of your Savior for forgiveness and strengthening. When you come to Communion today and every time, come hungry, hungry for the Lord, for his love, for the forgiveness of your sins. And leave satisfied.

This is the banquet the Lord has invited you to. He invites you to feed on the Bread of Life. No other meal satisfies. There is no better offer. There is no other Jesus. There is no other Savior. He has the words of eternal life. Amen.