



**Redeemer Lutheran Church of Leisure World and
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Worship and Discipleship by Margo Geesing

“The Bread of Life”

Starting the last Sunday of July and continuing through the end of August we hear pretty much the entirety of (a few verses are skipped here and there) chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. This is the discourse on Jesus being the bread of life. The Gospel of John focuses on the Divinity of Jesus, Salvation through Him, and this comes to the front especially in this chapter. An interesting note as you read through the August Gospel lessons – each one begins with the ending verse(s) of the previous Gospel lesson. This discourse is broken up into small steps by Jesus in the hope that the people will come to believe. Step one: feed the people. Step two: Set the request for belief and begin the idea of being the Bread of Life, come down from Heaven; sent by the Father; one with the Father. Step three: Restate being sent by the Father; being one with the Father; and the way to eternal life is through him. Step four: State the fact that they need to eat of him for eternal life. Step five: Accept the reality that not everyone who has followed are willing to fully believe leading to a confession of faith by Peter, *“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

So, a quick recap of the final Gospel lesson from July – Jesus feeds the 5,000 with two fish and five loaves. Well, that was exciting and hey, everybody loves free food!

Now we come to the first Sunday of August where the people who had been fed are still following him. Jesus sees that the people following him just want more. They ask for more food, for more signs, more works. The fact that he just fed them was not enough. They have been fed and now want to know what to do! Jesus puts it to them directly: BELIEVE. Believe in God. Believe in Jesus who was sent by God. He gently reminds them that Moses didn’t feed the Israelites in the desert but the Father. He ends with the statement that he IS the Bread of Life!

Which leads to the next Sunday where he starts with the statement that he is the bread of life. This is the moment where the doubting begins! Who is this guy? What does he mean? Don’t we already know who he is? Don’t we already know all about him? Jesus reminds them of the prophets and the promises made to them: that they shall be taught by God. He ends going a step forward: not only is he the bread of life but that his own flesh is that bread.

The third week begins with this statement and continues with more questions from his followers. That step further has them all questioning his sanity. For them, it makes no sense. Jesus is THE connection to eternal life. We have the advantage that we know the whole story so we can understand that connection.

The fourth Sunday of August comes the big question from Jesus. This lesson begins with the promise that He IS the Bread of Life and by partaking of this, we get eternal life. He recognizes that what he is saying is difficult and he is compassionate and sorrowful with his followers. He tries to walk them slowly through the logic of his statements. He does a little foreshadowing but realizes that not all of them will continue with him. He finally goes to his stalwart twelve and asked if they would continue with him. Our favorite passionate disciple, Peter, gives him the perfect answer: *“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”* [John 6:68-69]

As Christians, we believe in the True Presence of Christ in Holy Communion. Exactly how, why, and the naming of the process for the True Presence of Christ, body and blood, present in Holy Communion may differ but the core statement of Jesus: I am the Bread of Life; and the directive: ⁵⁴*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day;* ⁵⁵*for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.* ⁵⁶*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.* [John 6:54-56] is being given in our Church each time we have Holy Communion. And it is in this promise of Jesus that is at the core of our faith.

The Lutherans have given expression to the reality of the Eucharistic presence by speaking of presence of *Christ's Body and Blood in, with and under bread and wine*. Here they see real analogy to the Lord's incarnation: as God and man become one in Jesus Christ, Christ's body and blood, on the one hand, and the bread and wine, on the other, give rise to a sacramental unity.

The statement I could find for the Episcopal Church is: *“The elements are not mere signs; Christ's body and blood become really present and are really given. But they are really present and given in order that, receiving them, believers may be united in communion with Christ the Lord.”* *“The Body and Blood of Christ given to his people and received by faith.”* (BCP, p. 859).

And, I'm going to throw in the Roman Catholic understanding [because that's what I am] to mitigate any errors I may have made! *“By the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.* (CCC, 1376)

This month take a look at your own reactions to these passages. When have you doubted? What brought you back or answered your questions? Or, do you still have doubts? Do you believe or are you still questioning like those in the first weeks of Gospel lesson? Who is Jesus for you? Do you believe that Jesus is the Bread of Life? What do you believe about Holy Communion? What does the Church teach about the Presence of Jesus in Holy Communion? Do you have doubts about the Presence of Jesus in Holy Communion? What can you do to answer them?