



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

August 25, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

14th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Joshua 24:1-2, 14-18](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 119c CW

Second Lesson: [Hebrews 11:24-28](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [John 6:51-69](#)

I Am the Bread of Life The Only Food We Really Need THE DIFFICULTY OF EATING RIGHT

1. Jesus, the Bread of Life, _____ us _____
2. Jesus' teachings are _____ and _____
3. How can we eat _____?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____ with faith
 - c. _____ it _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Maybe you've heard some of these terms/names before: Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers, Atkins, and Noom? I preached in Shirley last week and I said "You may have heard these," and I said "Jenny Craig" and some of the younger people in the front row went "Jenny Craig?" I thought "Oh, my! I'm getting old!" Some of you that might be older might not know what "Noom" is, but what are all these (Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers, and Atkins)? They are all different diets. There is always a new diet, always a new fad, always something. Why are there all these diets? It's because it's hard to eat right. Would you say there is a **difficulty in eating right?** Why else would there be these huge businesses and corporations for diets and always something new. There are always people trying to eat right because it's not easy to eat right. Those foods that we love to eat are usually not the carrots and the greens that are healthy. Usually the things we love to eat are the things with toppings and cream and all the sugar. It's easy to eat those things that we know aren't that good for us. It's so hard to eat right.

That's really the whole focus of what Jesus is talking about in our text today. As he is talking to the people in Capernaum, the people who have been following him, he is going to talk to them about eating right.

If you remember a couple weeks ago why he is talking about all of this is because he had fed the people. He had given them bread, pretty much out of nothing. He fed the 5,000 and then he disappeared. The people followed him and found him and they said "How did you get here?" Then Jesus kind of scolds them because he says "I know why you are following me, not because you are curious how I got here but because you had your fill. You saw this sign. You liked this miracle, but you had your fill." The verb used there was like pigs eating—to be so satisfied, to fill your belly. Not only did they want their fill, but then they said, "You know what, Jesus. Moses gave us bread day after day. He gave us this manna day after day. Why don't you do that for us, too?"

Last week we heard a little bit about how Jesus was correcting them about what true eating is and who are his people and following about this true Bread that raises.

This week we see that Jesus is the true Bread of Life and what that means—that it's so much more than they wanted, just this physical eating to fill their bellies. But it's not an easy teaching. What does it mean that Jesus is the true Bread of Life? Let's look at what he says and why this is difficult. When you hear this and then you hear later that people say, "This is hard" and they want to leave, maybe you can understand why as we read this. But think about what is repeated over and over again. What is his point in talking about this? There is a really hard part, and we think, "Why is he saying it this way?" But he repeats something over and over again.

He says: ***"I am the living bread that came down from heaven."*** That's what he is telling the people they should want, not this manna and this food to eat, but him. So he says, ***"Whoever eats this bread 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, "Very truly I tell you, 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 them up at 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 them. 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 ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*** It's a hard teaching. He is saying, "Whoever eats me, whoever drinks my blood and eats my flesh," and they think "Ooh!" Even today, we say "Ooh." We have a different context because we eat the Lord's Supper, but what is important is here he is not instituting the Lord's Supper. Everyone here is not believers and he is not having this bread and saying "This is my body. This is my blood." He is saying, "Eat my flesh.

Drink my blood." So the people think, "Oh, this is hard!" But what was the focus? What did he say over and over again? He said if you eat the Son of Man, his flesh, this Bread, you will live forever. So it's a hard teaching because they are hearing about this eating, but the whole point is that Jesus is the Bread of Life. That's what he is saying. And what does the Bread of Life do? *Jesus, the Bread of Life, gives us life.*

Over and over again he says "Unless you eat, you cannot have life. Unless you have this Bread of Life, there is no eternal life." He says it over and over again. That's the key to understanding that it's not this physical eating but a spiritual eating of Jesus—that faith in him that he is the Son of God, that he is the one who came to redeem us. And if we believe in him as the Son of God, the one who is promised, the Messiah, the one who came to forgive our sins, we have true life. We have life now, real forgiveness and peace, and then he says "Life eternal." "They will not die but live forever. You eat food and you eat bread every day, this manna, but they died. If you eat and believe in Jesus, the Son of Man, you'll live forever." This was not an easy teaching.

Even the disciples go and say that this was difficult. It says in Verse 60: ***On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"*** Can you imagine that? Jesus is finishing teaching something that is very difficult and the disciples are saying "This is hard" and Jesus says, "Are you offended?" knowing that many people are leaving and it is a hard teaching? But what is the truth? *Jesus' teachings are hard and offensive.*

Do you think that is true? Are there things that you read in the Bible that are hard, that are offensive? There are things that our sinful nature does not want to hear. Over and over again, maybe there are things in the Old Testament that, to our culture or to our ways or when we can't see the whole picture or understand how God works, we say "That is hard! That's offensive! It's difficult!" The things that Jesus said, he is God, we are man, we struggle with and we can easily see how the world often wants nothing to do with the Bible. But we have to look at how it's not just offensive to them and we have to say "When is it offensive to me? What are the things that Jesus says that I just kind of want to gloss over because it offends me?"

God teaches us and he gives us commands that we don't often like. What are some of those examples? What are things that might offend you that Jesus said? Maybe in an election year when our world is so divided God says to respect your authority, to pray for those who are your leaders, your leaders now, and to have respect for them. Is that offensive? Is that hard for you to do? Maybe it's something about who you choose to sleep with, who you choose to love? If that's not inside of marriage or if there are things inside of marriage that God says "Don't do..." to stay chaste, to not look at pornography, do we say "Oh, that doesn't hurt." Maybe it has something to do with how much you should drink? Our culture says "Everyone just does it and it's so easy and it doesn't hurt

anyone and it's just having fun." But God says "Don't get drunk." Is that offensive? Or what about this one: God says to forgive everyone, even the people that have hurt you the most and that you say "How could I ever forgive them? They don't deserve my forgiveness." But should a Christian ever say "I could never forgive them"? That's something we hear all the time! But God has forgiven you all your sins and you don't deserve his forgiveness, so is there anyone that we should ever say "I could never forgive them"? Not at all! God says to love our enemies. I think sometimes it's easier for us to love our enemies and to forgive someone we don't really know than to forgive those closest to us who have hurt us deeply and we say "I could NEVER forgive them." That's not a Christian teaching. God calls us to forgive EVERYONE, even if it's hard, even if we don't want to, because God has forgiven you.

Is it true that Jesus' teachings are hard and offensive? We know that many of the teachings of the Bible are offensive to the world. We know that. But take it to heart and look in your heart and say "What is offensive to me that these things, this healthy eating, this looking at God's Word can be so offensive to me at times and I can just ignore them?"

Then what is the key? We look at this and as Jesus is saying, "Does this offend you?" he says, ***"Then 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—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe."*** He asked them later, ***"You do not want to leave too, do you?"*** Because what happens? ***From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*** So he was asking the disciples if they wanted to leave. But Simon answered, ***"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."***

So what is the difference here between the ones who are leaving and the ones who are staying? I would say it's the ones who are "eating" Jesus. What do I mean by that? Not eating him physically but eating spiritually. They are the ones—as he said here, his Words give life. ***"The Spirit gives life... The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life."*** And if you are eating that, if you are taking in those words and the Holy Spirit is working, you stay. So *how can we eat spiritually?* If this is all about eating right, then how can we do that?

I think the first thing to look at when we are talking about eating spiritually is *listening*. You've maybe heard me talk about this before. Stephen Covey of Seven Habits of Highly Effective People always says this: What do we get trained in so well? In school we talk about all the time learning how to write and learning how to communicate by maybe doing speeches. But what type of communication do you not learn very well?—how to listen. How good are we at listening? I would even say it's always hard to listen well, to listen actively, but in today's world, it's even harder as attention spans have gone

to nothing and we have these massive computers in our palms with movies and YouTube and everything to distract us. So how hard it is to listen to your spouse? It's so hard to listen today. How hard is it to listen to God and his Word, to take root, and to (as our Psalm said) dine on God's Word, that sweet Word that gives us forgiveness and hope and peace? Think about ways that you can listen better here at church, at home.

I don't know how it is for you. Maybe you have a good practice at home, but maybe you are struggling. Maybe you can find a new way to set aside that time and put it on the schedule, or even here at church. For me, if I'm in a meeting or at a seminar and if someone talks to me for more than two minutes, how much do you remember unless you are writing something down? Do you have to take notes? You don't have to, but is it easy to forget? That's one of the reasons I have those sermon notes. If it helps you to remember things, don't be afraid to take notes and write things down, but if you're good and you can listen without that, then great. But even think about how you can prepare yourself to listen well as you come to church. Maybe it's getting here and reading through the Scriptures or maybe there are other ways that we, as a church, can prepare you to have your hearts ready to listen and know what is being preached.

So listening is important but what else is important? As he says, ***"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing."*** So what do we have to do? We have to believe through faith; so we have *accepting with faith*. I'm not saying decision theology but believing because of faith. What it is really saying is "God, you know better." But sometimes the teachings are hard. Or something happens in life that is really, really difficult, and it's hard. So we have to listen and believe because of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. This is exactly what Peter answers. The other people aren't listening and even though this is difficult, he says, ***"Lord, to whom shall we go?"*** Do you know an easy way to think about what "Lord" means? "You're the boss. Your way goes. What I think and what I want is secondary." So Peter says, "Lord, it's your way. You're right. Even though this is hard for me, ***you have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.*** What else is there?" They've been listening and believing and even though this is a hard teaching, they know who Jesus is and what he has been preaching about forgiveness and eternal life. So they believe by faith.

Sometimes as we believe that and we are having the spiritual eating, we might ask what the last part of that is. For us, eating is easy. It's easy to pick up food. I have a little baby at home, almost 10 months old now. Is eating easy for her? We give her food and she kind of plays with it, but if you put food on a little spoon and put it on her mouth, what does she do? She takes it and makes a face and then what does she often do? She spits it out. It's hard for her to swallow it down. It's hard for us to sometimes swallow God's Word down; to *swallow it down* and really apply it to ourselves; to say "This is true for me" or to see those hard, offensive teachings—the ones that point out

that I am sinful and say "It's talking about me." We need to do that because the rewards are so great. It's true that when I understand I'm a sinner, then I can apply the Gospel to myself. But if I don't understand that I'm a sinner, then why do I need that Gospel? When I see that I have fallen short and I can swallow down even those hard teachings, I can swallow down that sweet honey of the truth—to know that even though these teachings are hard, even though it's telling me to leave my life of sin and do these things that are hard and not the easy, sinful things, it is so much better because he has the Words of eternal life.

It's kind of been said that people like Jesus but they don't like the Church and his teaching. Would you say that's true? If you talk to people, they are like "Oh, yeah, Jesus. He's a cool guy." But when you talk to them about the Church or different teachings of the Bible, they are like "Huh." I think that's true because they're not really listening. They are not taking that Word in and swallowing it down and understanding what it is. They are also not understanding about God and how loving he is—that Jesus came to die for them. So instead of swallowing that Word in and digging deep into who Jesus is, they go away.

Jesus asked Peter and the disciples, "Are you, too, going to leave?" because there were many disciples, many people who were following him that did leave. Where did they go to? They went to their former ways of thinking, self-righteousness. There are many people in this world who don't want anything to do with Jesus. There are many people, sometimes in our Church, in the Christian faith, that struggle with what the Bible says, and where do they go? They go to a place that does not have eternal life. But what do we have?—the encouragement to bring people back and point them to the hard teachings because, "To whom shall we go?" Jesus is the one with the Words of eternal life, and we know that he is the Holy One, the one who truly gives life.

So we shouldn't downplay the fact that these teachings are sometimes hard. They are hard for unbelievers, and to be honest, they are hard for our sinful nature. But thanks be to God that he gives us the Spirit to eat, spiritually, to take his Word and to swallow it down and say "It is good to know of our Savior—to know the one in the face of difficulties, in the face of whatever we might face, that loved us so much to go to the cross, to die and rise again, and to give us eternal life." Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.