

**Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Christ
Jesus our Lord.**

1 Timothy 1:2

SERMON THEME: "The Intimacy of Faith"

SERMON TEXT: John 6:27, 47-58 (Read text first)

Dearly Beloved,

Let's start with a little survey. How many of you have read the Bible straight through from Genesis 1 to the end of Revelation? Now, how many of you understood everything you read? When we do try to read the Bible all the way through from the beginning we quickly find out that it is not one continuous narrative. The various writings are grouped by kind: In the Old Testament we have "books" of law, history, wisdom, then the major and minor prophets. The writings of the New Testament are grouped as the gospels, a history book, the Pauline and general epistles, and one book of prophecy. All tolled, the Bible contains 66 writings by over 40 different authors, written in a time span of over 1,500 years!

To top it off, we find a variety of writing styles, narrative or prose, poetry, sermons, hymns, prayers, apocalyptic language, parables, a variety of figures of speech including analogies, similes, metaphors, and more. Anyone who claims to have understood everything they read in the Bible is being less than candid. Even the greatest Bible scholars of all time have not made such a claim. Paul wrote, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord...?" (Romans 11:33, 34). **HOWEVER, in Scripture every detail of God's plan for saving the souls of sinful mankind through the atoning sacrifice of His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus, is abundantly clear! And His commandments, His will for the way we live our lives in order to please Him and glorify His holy name, is also crystal clear!**

Sometimes even the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, and the Law, clear as they are, are not understood, or are questioned. When reason is held superior to faith, when one refuses to yield to the Spirit-inspired Word of God, that person is blinded to the truth. Such was the case with the ruling Jews, the Pharisees,

and their followers who did not accept the authority of Jesus and His teachings.

This becomes apparent in our text. Jesus is teaching about a food which does not perish—the “Bread of Life”. Many of His hearers were those who witnessed the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. That was food to sustain life in the flesh. Now comes the metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase picturing one kind of object or idea is used in place of another. Jesus talks about the bread they were fed, but now focuses on the *eating* of bread in a different way. Bread is life-giving for the flesh, but there is a bread that is life-giving for the soul! And as manna came down from heaven to sustain life in the wilderness during the time of Moses, so also Bread has now come down from heaven to give life to the soul! Jesus, in verse 47, gives a major clue to the meaning of what He is about to say: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” To believe is to have faith. This, we will see, is the key word in our meditation!

Then verse 48, only six words, but central to this entire lesson! “I am the Bread of Life”. Right away, reason objects. A person is not bread... But Jesus goes on (v. 50), “This is the Bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die.” In verse 51 He elaborates: “I am the *living* Bread...if anyone eats of this Bread he will live forever.” Again, reason must object: Bread that is alive? And doesn’t everyone die? Then comes the final challenge for human reason: “...the Bread which I give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Now, if you were just reading through the Bible, and came to this passage, what would you think?! How should this be understood? It does not stand to reason, of course. Quite obviously, this was the case with the Jews whose spiritual ignorance became evident when they asked (v. 52), “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” To the carnal mind this is a very logical question. Despite His many miracles, they still saw Jesus as nothing more than a mere man. And as such, an eating of His flesh in a literal, gross, physical way was unrealistic, unthinkable. No wonder Jesus’ words disturbed them greatly! They disputed among themselves, some no doubt thinking Jesus was on the verge of insanity!

Jesus, of course, knew what was in their hearts. He knew their lack of understanding, their unbelief. His answer would befuddle them all the more because His metaphor was about to go even deeper into the truth He was conveying to everyone within hearing, as well as to us today! And the truth of what He had to say takes us to the very heart of Christianity, to the core of the way we believe! By God's grace, and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit we *are* able to understand!

First of all, in a cursory or quick reading, the text might seem to be talking about the Lord's Supper, the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. But this is not the context at all. This is not about communion. Let's examine the words of Jesus more closely and pray the Spirit give us a clear meaning!

Verse 51: "I am the living Bread..." "I" and no other! We recall Peter's words when he defended the Gospel before the Jewish rulers (Sanhedrin) in Jerusalem, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we are saved" (Acts 4:12). Not Baal, not any of the deities conceived by Asiatic minds, not Allah, not any god of any tribe or race in all creation! The "Living Bread" is none other than Jesus Christ Himself! He is the only Savior! He is the very essence of life, and it is this (His) life He desires to impart to those who eat this godly bread! This is a spiritual eating!

Here is what we need to understand. Here is the meaning of Jesus' words then and now: *To eat is to believe in Jesus!* Eating equals faith; eating the Bread of Life is faith! Eating equals believing from the depths of the heart in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior! And this believing is a living faith, not a dead one that simply believes He is the Savior yet failing to do His will. Again, to eat the Bread of Life is to have a living, active faith in Jesus Christ—a faith rooted in love! To have faith in Jesus, to trust Him with our very souls, is so personal, so close, that His Spirit and ours are merged, joined, made one! This is "The Intimacy of Faith"! Here (v. 56) and later Jesus describes this intimate relationship this way, "...you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me and I in you" (14:20)!

In response to the Jew's question, Jesus now goes even deeper, undoubtedly confounding them even more. But for us, His

metaphorical definition of faith becomes even more meaningful! In verses 53 and 54 He repeats the necessity for eating His flesh, the Bread of Life, but now he adds a critical element; "...he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life." The intimacy of faith is both deepened and now sealed with His blood! We aren't told, but this was likely the "last straw" for the Jews who were there. They may have walked off shaking their heads, thinking Jesus' words were no longer worthy of rational consideration. And some of Jesus' followers did leave, as we see later in verse 66. Even the disciples of Jesus—the Twelve—found their Lord's words hard to listen to and understand (v. 60).

You may have noticed, verse 53 is a word of law: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." This is both a warning and a judgment! Metaphor aside, Jesus is saying this: "Unless you believe to the depths of your heart, mind, and soul in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you have no life in you!" The unbeliever does not have eternal life with God! Nor the doubter. Nor the person who refuses to obey God's commandments. Nor the impenitent sinner. Nor the lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-17). As Jesus had made quite clear, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). And the will of God is this, as we find it spelled out in 1 John 3: "This is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another" (v. 23).

Returning to Jesus' figure of speech, this is saying, "This is His commandment, that we should eat the flesh and drink the blood of God's Son, Jesus, and love one another." This intimacy of faith is now affirmed by Jesus Himself as He elaborates on the nature of a true and abiding faith by saying (vv. 55, 56), "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in Him." This is a divine guarantee, a promise from a God who never breaks promises! When your faith and mine is real, genuine, fervent, zealous, grafted into our very nature, we are truly one with Christ! When it is so *intimate* we come to think and do as Jesus did, we know we will live forever!

For most of us the seed of faith was planted already in Holy

Baptism. For others it came through hearing the preaching of Christ crucified! Following our conversion, our spiritual rebirth, our faith has been nurtured through Word and Sacrament. These are the means by which we are fed the flesh and blood of Jesus, which is to say, this is how our faith is strengthened, how we become even closer to Jesus! Remember, faith is the "conviction of things not seen..." (Hebrews 11:1). Jesus gave Himself, His body, for the sake of the life of the world. The human nature of Christ was sacrificed—given for the salvation of all sinners without exception! In this way Jesus becomes the Bread of Life and the blood which have come down from heaven!

And it is only by the grace of God that we can partake of the Father's holy Son; it is not an eating and drinking of our own doing. Salvation is a free gift of God! Faith is a free gift of the Holy Spirit! And the essence of faith is this, that we receive Jesus as a gift; that we abandon all else and let Him give Himself to us, let Him feed us His flesh and blood! Faith begets faith—by faith, and only by faith, the body of Christ is true food, and His blood true drink. To partake of Him is to be united with His very being, to be spiritually one with our Lord and Savior! This is a most intimate bond of faith! When we believe the Gospel and repent we are intimately and inseparably united with our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who is righteous; then we too are righteous, without sin, holy. And as almighty God is eternal, then we are also eternal!

Surely we all want to go to heaven, that never-ending paradise! This means eating the bread and drinking the blood as Jesus tells us here! This means having a living faith in Christ Jesus! Remember, eating is faith; the flesh and blood are Jesus. Believe in Jesus! Believe He died that we may have life! Believe that when we confess our sins our Father in heaven forgives us for His sake! Above all, our eternal destiny depends on loving our gracious Lord, doing His holy will, and rejoicing in the expectation of the glory soon to come!

The next time you sit down to read the Scriptures, pray first. Ask the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to enlighten you as you read and meditate. Then, eat the Bread of Life and drink the blood so freely offered—in other words, believe, have FAITH that you will understand the words God has caused to be written!

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**Then your hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied!
Then you will live forever! In Jesus' name, Amen.**

**The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will
keep your hearts and minds through a living faith in Christ Jesus.
Amen.**

Rev. Donald P. Tonack

