



Jesus offers us Living Water and the Bread of Life

John 6:35, John 6:48–69

Sermon for June 12, 2022

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We are studying the New City Catechism this year, because it is a great summary of what we believe as Christians.

I'm going to read Question 24 now, and then let's read the answer together.

Question 24: Why was it necessary for Christ, the Redeemer, to die?

Since death is the punishment for sin, Christ died willingly in our place to deliver us from the power and penalty of sin and bring us back to God.

By his substitutionary atoning death, he alone redeems us from hell and gains for us forgiveness of sin, righteousness, and everlasting life.

Introduction

On the back of our church's business cards it says "We wish to see Jesus" in many languages. Why is important to see Jesus? Because only Jesus can offer us a life of shalom. Shalom is a Hebrew word that means more than "peace." It means "Deep contentment in all areas of life." That is the kind of life Jesus offers to us if we are united to him. We can have shalom even in this broken and painful world, if Jesus is our Lord and Savior. That shalom also continues when we die, giving us eternal life and peace forever in heaven.

To help us see him more clearly, Jesus gives us sacraments. Sacraments are visible signs and seals of Christ's finished work. Sacraments remind us that through Jesus we are connected to God and to each other as a community of faith. Today we are going to celebrate both of the sacraments: baptism and communion. For our sermon we are going to look at John chapter 6. Here Jesus talks about the source of life that lasts forever.

John 6:35

35 Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again.
Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

John 6:48–69

48 "Yes, I am the bread of life!

49 Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died.

50 Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die.

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."

52 Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant.

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

53 So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you.

54 But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day.

55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

56 Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

57 I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me.

58 I am the true bread that came down from heaven.

Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever."

59 He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

60 Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand.

How can anyone accept it?"

61 Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, "Does this offend you?"

62 Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again?"

63 The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing.

And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

64 But some of you do not believe me."

(For Jesus knew from the beginning which ones didn't believe, and he knew who would betray him.)

65 Then he said, "That is why I said that people can't come to me unless the Father gives them to me."

66 At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him.

67 Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?"

68 Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.

69 We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God."

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth. Jesus, we worship because you are full of mercy and love. Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God. Amen.

Jesus says repeatedly in John 6 that he is the bread of life.

What does that mean? In verses 49 and 50 Jesus compares manna with the bread of life. Manna was a good gift from God that sustained the people in the desert for 40 years. It was supernatural bread. But the people who ate it died anyway. They drank miraculous water from the rock, but they still died.

God led his people into the desert to teach them about the source of real life. Moses said this in Deuteronomy 8:3.

3 "And God humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know;

that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Jesus is teaching us the same thing John 6. Jesus is saying to us all: "I am what you need. You will find life in no one else and in nothing else." That's why when we talk about the sacraments we have to avoid thinking that the grace of God comes from the elements.

In baptism the water itself has no power. It isn't holy water. It is a picture of Christ. Jesus is the one who washes us. Therefore it isn't important if the water is sprinkled on you, or is poured on you, or you go into the water. More water does not give you more grace. Jesus himself pours out abundant grace to us through the sacraments.

Eating a larger piece of this bread will not deliver more Jesus to you. A bigger cup of juice won't make you more spiritual. God doesn't put grace into the elements, and then you ingest grace by eating it. We don't believe that power comes to us through sacred objects. We don't baptize people with "holy water." We don't serve "holy bread and wine." There's no magical power at work here.

Instead, the water of baptism points you to Jesus who is holy, and who can actually cleanse souls. The bread and wine of communion point you to Jesus. He is our sacrificial Lamb who died to make you part of the covenant community in a permanent lasting way. The Holy Spirit is the one who pours out spiritual blessings to strengthen and sustain you. The power you need in your life is not in the bread and cup on this table. God is the one with the power you need. Look to Him!

Let's read again what Jesus says in verse 35.

35 "I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Jesus does not say "he who eats special bread" will never go hungry. Instead Jesus says that anyone who "comes to me" and "he who believes" will never be hungry or thirsty. When we serve you the of bread we often say to you, "This is Christ's body." Do we mean that it is Christ's actual human flesh? No. When Jesus told the disciples at the Last Supper, "this is my body" they understood what he was saying. Jesus was saying, this bread represents my body. If I show you a photograph and say, "This is my oldest child, Lucy." Do you think the photo is Lucy? No, it is a picture of her.

Jesus used all kinds of pictures to help us understand who he is and what he means to us. Jesus said "I am the door." Jesus said "I am the gate." Jesus also said "I am the Vine, the Shepherd, the Light of the world."

Did Jesus ever turn himself into a door, or a vine? No. But God knows we are visual learners. We need imagery and

metaphor and pictures to help us understand things.

That's why Jesus says he is the Gate, the Door, the Way, and the Shepherd. Jesus is also the Light, the Lamb, the Bread, the Bridegroom, the Vine. These pictures help us understand the character and mission of Christ on earth. Don't put your hope in a door, or a gate, or in this bread and cup! Put your hope in Christ alone.

Why do we have sacraments then?

Because physical sacraments help us understand and receive the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. 1600 years ago, the African bishop Augustine defined the word sacrament. Augustine said a sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and enduring grace." The water of baptism is a physical picture of being washed clean by Jesus. This table is a visible sign that reminds us that Jesus is the source of true life.

I do have sympathy with the crowd in John 6. I can understand why they were confused. Look at these verses again.

John 6:53, 55, 56, 59, 60.

53 So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you.

55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

56 Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

59 He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

60 Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?"

Why did Jesus use this kind of dramatic language that confused people? Why didn't Jesus simply say: "I am the source of life, believe in me." Jesus uses dramatic language because he needs to shake us out of our delusions of autonomy. Jesus is saying something that our stubborn hearts don't want to believe. We are very committed to our independence. Not political independence, like when a country fights for freedom from colonial powers. I'm talking about spiritual independence. Our most basic sin is our desire for autonomy and freedom from God. The sacraments are an antidote for the poisonous sin of pride.

Jesus says this in verse 53: "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you." Jesus is saying this to us: "I am not a weekly appointment on your calendar. I'm not a hobby. I'm not a lifestyle choice you inherited from your parents. I'm not a moderately important part of your life. I AM your life!"

You are dependent on having food and drink several times a day, right? You must eat and drink or you will die. Jesus

says: "You need me even more than that. I am as fundamental to your existence as food and water."

Let's talk about blood now. Look again at verses 55-56:

"55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

56 Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."

To the Jewish mind, the life of a person or an animal was in the blood. To consume the blood of an animal was to drink its life, and that was forbidden. The Jewish people also understood that blood was connected to forgiveness. When the lifeblood of an animal was poured out as a sacrifice, it paid for the penalty of sin.

Today when you buy a house or a new car, you sign a contract. You promise to pay back the money you borrowed from the bank. You promise to give the house or car back if you break the contract. Thousands of years ago, people promised blood when they made a covenant or contract. The blood of an animal was spilled to remind everyone how deadly serious the contract was.

Your body has 4 or 5 quarts of blood containing more than 4,000 different components. Your blood does two very important things for you. First, it removes carbon dioxide, ammonia, and other waste products. In other words, your blood prevents death by taking away toxins. Your blood also maintains life by transporting oxygen and nutrients to our cells. Isn't that interesting? Our blood takes away toxins and brings nutrients. The blood of Jesus takes away sin and death and brings life.

I do understand why the words of Jesus about blood were confusing for some of the disciples. Look again at John 6:66-69.

66 "At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him.

67 Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?"

68 Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.

69 We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God."

Jesus lost some followers because of this teaching. It was just too confusing, too hard to accept. So they walked away. But where did they go? I hope some of them came back to Jesus. I hope they realized what Peter understood. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through the Son. That's why Peter said in verse 68: "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life."

Where else can we go, my friends? In John 6, Jesus says that true life comes by eating bread, by believing, by

drinking the blood, and by hearing His words. All of these images communicate the same message. Jesus is the only source of true life.

The Scottish preacher Robert Bruce said, "in the preaching of the Word we are led to Christ by the ear, and in the sacraments we are led to Christ by the eye." The purpose of every part of worship is to lead you to Christ.

So, when we come to the table today, it's not actually important if it is juice or wine in the cup. It doesn't matter if you choose the bread or the gluten free cracker. It doesn't matter if you sit or kneel or stand when you eat. When I grew up in the Catholic Church we would kneel during communion. But it's okay if you stand or sit. The question is this: Is your heart kneeling? The sacrament is your heart's opportunity to kneel and say to the Lord: "You are all I really need."

I want you to remember that when you see the baptism of our sister in a few minutes. I want you to remember that when we participate in communion today. Jesus has laid down many different paths to himself. Many ways for different people from different backgrounds to come to him no matter who you are or where you have been.

If you think you cannot find your way to God, Jesus says that he is the Way. If God seems to be behind some kind of barrier, then Jesus is your Door. If you are feeling the weight of your sin and failures, Jesus is the water that washes you and the blood that purifies you. When Satan reminds of your sin and tries to burden you with guilt, remember your baptism and what it means.

When you are feeling lost, remember that Jesus is your Shepherd to guide you. If you feel faint and weary he is the Vine that nourishes you. If you are feeling weak and needy, Christ is the Bread that sustains you. And when you are full of joy because you are God's child, Christ invites you to share in the cup of celebration and the wedding feast in heaven.

I am going to close the sermon now with prayer. And then with joy and thanksgiving we will celebrate the sacraments of communion and baptism together as a church family.

Closing Prayer Jesus, we are the sheep of your pasture. Thank you for being a good Shepherd who knows us, protects us, and feeds us. Like stupid sheep, we do not learn well and we forget what we learn. We need these different images, metaphors, pictures, to help our feeble human minds understand your love and mercy. We are stubborn and want to go our own way. Holy Spirit, remind us how much we need Jesus. Father, remind us that we are children who depend on you for every good thing. We pray this with hope in the powerful name of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Amen.

