

Sermon Theme: Hear and Learn

Sermon Reading: John 6:41-51

Well, it happened again. It seems like we were just celebrating the 4th of July and somehow it's time for school to start already! It's amazing, almost, how quickly that all happened. School supplies are bought, new clothes are ready to go, teachers are putting the last touches on their classrooms, students and families are trying to cram in a little bit of last minute summer fun before it all begins. Even if you don't have children in school you might remember the excitement with the new school year. You start off with a fresh slate; no one is in trouble yet. There's the excitement of refreshing and reviewing some of the old while getting ready to wrestle with the new. It's fun to learn new things; especially when you understand them right of way. But then there's some other new things—a new equation in math, a grammatical point in English, a theory in Science—but try as you might, you just can't seem to grasp it. It's so frustrating. There's this battle inside the student often accompanied with all sorts of moaning and groaning involved: are you going to keep on wrestling with it, working on it, or are you going to give up and hope that you only get reviewed on it once. But even when you are out of school, we still wrestle with this; it's just no longer confined to a classroom. When we aren't able to make sense of something, when things are different or changing from what we know and are comfortable with, when we can't find the answer to our questions, or the answers aren't what we want to hear, we're like those students and a lot like those Jews in John 6 and there's this dull roar of grumbling, moaning, and groaning either out loud or we feel it in our hearts.

It hadn't been that long ago since Jesus miraculously fed the 5000 with the loaves of bread and small fish. But when the people were all excited Jesus bolts for the hills. He goes off by himself because he knew these people were more focused on their stomachs than on their hearts and souls. So the people go looking for Jesus because they still want their Bread King who would give them free food. But then when Jesus challenged the people, they insisted they needed another sign; more proof that he is someone they should believe and follow. The people point to how their fathers had this bread from heaven—manna—given to them and they were expecting the promised one of God to do the same thing—send more manna for the people to eat. They were so focused on filling their stomachs, on the physical gifts from God, they were missing God's greater gift. Jesus said, **“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”** (v.35).

But that was the problem. To them, Jesus was making some outrageous claims. You can almost hear the murmurs, “Who does this guy think he is? Does he think we are so naïve?” They knew Jesus, even before he had went and got himself all famous. With a sarcastic tone you can almost read their words in verse v.42, **“Isn't this Jesus, the son**

of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” It’s almost like they were saying, “You maybe can try pulling that down in Jerusalem, but not up here. We know you. We know your mom and dad. He was our carpenter. You worked for him.” Their problem was when they saw Jesus, even after that miraculous feeding, they saw just another human being who was able to do extraordinary things. Special—a little; Bread of life from heaven—are you kidding? Their focus on their physical proof that they could see and from what they already knew and were able to understand was in the way of them understanding and believing what Jesus had to say.

We wouldn’t do that would we? You know Jesus is more than just an ordinary human being. You know that he is more than Mary’s biological child. You know he is true God and therefore all-powerful, all-knowing, ever present. You wouldn’t confine Jesus and short-change his capabilities or who he is, would you? But that’s exactly what we do when we doubt our prayers are heard or they will change anything. That’s what we do when we doubt whether Jesus knows or cares about the struggles you face and the difficulties you wrestle with. That’s what we do when we doubt that he can or actually will forgive me all my sins—including the one I keep struggling with.

We underestimate Jesus’ capabilities because we cannot begin to fully measure them on our own. They are beyond our comprehension. Something that is all-powerful just doesn’t make any sense; everything has a limit from the physical proof we see and from what we can understand. And so even when we know better, when we know what God’s Word says he is capable of doing, we almost can’t help but short-change him. But like those Jews, I don’t always see—or admit—the problem begins with me—my lack of trust, my unbelief, my sinful self. I can’t understand something so instead I focus on the physical proof that I can see in my life: the difficulties that are still very present, the pet sin that just won’t go away, the prayers that weren’t answered the way I wanted. And so, I struggle or don’t believe.

See how lovingly patient Jesus is. And in his patience in v.43 and following he tells the people to stop grumbling, to hear, and listen. Stop grumbling because grumbling doesn’t help. Sure, it is good to get things off our chests and it’s not good to bottle things up or try and bury them. But, we need to be honest with ourselves in those moments, is that the reason why you are doing it? Or is it because you like to complain and it feels good to do it? This murmuring, grumbling doesn’t help but more often it intensifies unbelief. So Jesus says, “Stop grumbling.”

And then lovingly he explains the problem. In v.44 he points out the simple fact that no one can come to Jesus—that is believe Jesus and trust his promises—unless the Father draws them. In order to believe what Jesus says is true, one must be brought to faith. Otherwise, it does sound foolish. It does sound ridiculous. But to be brought, to have

faith only comes from God. It is only the Father who does this work; there is no cooperative work with the individual. As someone draws a sword from its scabbard so the Father draws us from unbelief to faith—the sword is not responsible for no longer being in that scabbard so we aren't responsible for the gift of faith.

With that gift of faith, conversion, the work of God has already brought you from death to life. But as we continue our lives as God's people our theological fathers also spoke wisely about continuous conversion. Because who of us, along with those Jews, doesn't know how we, grumble a little bit that God chooses to work in us through such lowly simple things of his Word and Sacraments—why doesn't he use something that will grab our attention more, that will shake more to the core? Who of us doesn't know what it's like to be like Elijah and wrestle our inner pessimist wondering if this whole kingdom of God is a lost cause? Who of us doesn't wrestle with bitterness, rage and anger, when people hurt us and our pride is injured or when life doesn't go the way we have planned? And so, this continual conversion takes place where we daily die to our natural born unbelief with our sinful nature and skeptic heart and daily we need to be wooed by the gospel to ever stronger faith.

And so hear Jesus' promises and gospel good news that he gives to you: he is the Bread of Life. He is far greater than that heavenly, miraculous bread—manna—that was sent from heaven. He is the bread given to the world: anyone may eat from him and not die because everyone who believes has eternal life. Believing, having faith is knowing Jesus, trusting his promises, and holding these as your own. And Jesus' promise is that he gives you this bread which is his flesh. Now, Jesus is not talking about the Lord's Supper here at this instance. Instead, he is talking about what he would do for all people when he would give up his flesh to save sinners like you and me. He is speaking about very real death on the cross that won you forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. The Father gave his Son to be the Bread of Life. The Son willingly gives his flesh to give us eternal life.

Hear these promises Jesus gives to you. By them the Father draws you to him and then makes them your own. Be warned, you can still resist the Father's work. As many did in Jesus' day, so we are capable of doing this too. Because one used to go to church all the time or one used to go to Zion Lutheran School does not mean anything if one is found to be without faith. And so the Father continues to work to draw you to him with the same thing that gives you life: he offers and gives you the Bread of Life. Continue to be taught by God. Be filled up with that which gives you life—the Bread of Life, Jesus. Taste and see the Lord is good; blessed are they who take refuge in him (Psalm 34).

Hear Jesus' words that he speaks to you and listen to them. Take them to heart. Take time to think about them and what they mean for your life. Repent of those times when

you did not believe and trust resting in Jesus' forgiveness which is yours because the Father drew you to him. We want to grow in our faith by eating the Bread of life with continued use of God's Word and partaking of the Lord's Supper. We want to pray. Pray that the Father continues to draw you to him. Pray the words of Fredrich Funcke from our first hymn (CW 170 st. 5):

*Draw us to thee
Unceasingly;
Into thy kingdom take us.
Let us fore'er
Thy glory share;
Thy saints and joint heirs make us.*

Lord, you give eternal life; draw us to you to hear, listen, and be taught by you. Amen.