

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
12th Sunday after Pentecost
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
John 6:51-69

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

What does the Lord's Supper mean to you?
What importance does it have in your life?
Can you picture your life without it?

Think about it.

Week in and week out, you come to church, sing some hymns, pray some prayers, hear a sermon, and then come forward to receive a little wafer, no more than an inch in diameter, and paper thin. Then, to wash it down, you get a sip of wine—a sip and no more. And you got back to your pews, and go home.

It's regular, weekly, part of our liturgical routine.
And it's so insubstantial, so small, so momentary.

What could this possibly mean for your life?
For your day-to-day activities?
For your family and work, your school and time at the gym?

Does this Eucharist, or as the older Lutherans used to call it—the *mass*—does this have any meaning for your life?

Or, when you leave, when you get to brunch and fill your plate at the buffet, when you take your shoes off and sit in your chair, turn on your TV, do you forget entirely about what just happened?

Too often, dear Christians, we treat this sacrament of the altar as if it were merely a symbol,
an add-on, an appendix, a nice image of unity.

Too often we see this sacred meal as a cute religious custom—
certainly not essential to the Christian life.

Too often we think that this meal is a Sunday meal and nothing more.
That it has no relevance to my life.
That it isn't practical for the day-to-day, the working schedule.
We think this Eucharist has no bearing on our pain or suffering or stress or fear.
We think it's a nice close to the service, but that's all.

Too often we do not actually believe that what is given and received from this Altar is actually
the body and blood of Jesus.

But it really is—true body, true blood, real presence, real Jesus.

Now, if it's really Jesus, then our whole life ought to reflect this.
Our posture and attitude, our dress and our conversation—
all that we are stands now before the King of heaven and earth!

But if it's just bread and wine—
 just a symbol of something we're fairly sure is at least *spiritually* true—
 then do what you want, dress how you want, speak as you please, and forget about
 it once you leave.
 It doesn't matter!

Or, to get the point across, as Flannery O'Connor once said:
 “If it's just a symbol, to hell with it!”

Are you uneasy yet?
 A bit uncomfortable?
 Is what I'm saying *hard*?

Good.

Because now you're in the text.
 Now you're with those who gathered in that synagogue in Capernaum some 2,000 years ago.

Jesus also gave a sermon on eating His flesh and drinking His blood,
 and everyone got a bit squeamish!

He said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him...so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me... whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” (Jn 6:53-58)

For those who gathered that day—
 some of whom had miraculously feasted on the five loaves and two fish,
 some were new comers, hearing second-hand about this miracle working Jesus,
 some were simply there as was their usual custom—
 but for all gathered there that day, they were repulsed, scandalized:
 “Did He really say that?”.

Even His disciples joined in say,

“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (6:61)

And when we really press our teaching on the Lord's Supper we must say the same thing:
 “This is a hard saying.”

It would be far easier to have it be symbolic.
 It would be so simple to just *remember*, to piously come forward as a sign of our unity.
 It wouldn't cause so much offense, and then everyone could easily come forward.

If it was just a symbol, it wouldn't be so weighty, so serious, so dangerous.
 But if it were just a symbol, it wouldn't have any bearing on your life.
 Then you could take it or leave it, come as you please, or not please.

Then you could go on with your life and leave the Altar behind.

But it's not. Jesus said,

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (6:51)

This is the real deal.

And so it comes with a real weightiness, a real importance, real consequences, real presence.

That's why Jesus can say,

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

For only a few chapters earlier in this same Gospel Jesus said,

“Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3:5)

So our opening question, “What importance does it have on your life?”

We can now answer: everything.

For just as with Baptism we truly enter the kingdom of God, so in this meal we receive life itself.

The *Mass*, by which our Lutheran confessions simply mean the Lord's Supper, is all about *life*.

And it's about life because it's about Jesus.

Jesus, who said, **“I am the life of the world,”** now wants to give His life to you!

He wants to join His life with yours.

He wants to take your death, your mortality, your emptiness, brokenness, and your fear;

and He wants to give you His life, eternal life, fullness of life, life from the grave for you.

And He gives you His life by giving you His flesh and His blood.

Whatever hung on that cross, suffering for the sin of the world, is what you get here today.

Whatever had nails driven through it, whatever flowed from His spear-ridden side,

that's what you get.

It's no symbol here. No representation. No image or sign or pious thought.

This is the real deal, the real presence, the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, *given for you*.

And if this is too hard, then now's your chance to go.

If you'd rather try to find life some other way—

maybe an easier way, a less invasive and less personal way—

then feel free to go that way, you wouldn't be alone.

“After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him.” (6:66)

“Do you want to go away as well?” (6:67)

Or will you join St. Peter and all the faithful who see and feel and hate their sin, and say,

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (6:68-69)

And this Holy One of God, whose words are life, now puts His words into you: His flesh and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit