

*Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to thee, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly thine, utterly dedicated unto thee; and then use us, we pray thee, as thou wilt, and always to thy glory and the welfare of thy people; in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Good Morning!

Over the past few weeks, and really for the next few weeks to come, we have had and will have an opportunity to consider and meditate on the sixth chapter of Saint John's account of the Gospel. For many, including myself, it is among the most admired aspects of John's book, combining some of Jesus' most memorable works of power, with some of his most encouraging lines of discourse. Think again to how we began our walk through this text: we heard an account of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, beginning with the scant offering of a boy's five loaves and two fishes. After that, we heard about how because of his great mercy and generosity, the crowd saw fit to make him King. But kingship would not be fit for this Messiah, and he withdrew to a mountain to pray. In a showing of his true authority, he calmed the sea and walked on the water as he rejoined the disciples in their trip to Capernaum.

Recall last week, when we heard that some of the crowd sought him to perhaps inquire about more loaves and fishes, and Jesus used the opportunity to stretch their understanding of the bread that was truly on offer in his body; a source of life that had no limit, a source of eternal strength without spoil, a food that would satisfy well beyond the needs of the tummy, but indeed would feed the innermost parts of a human being. The people around him would say: "Sir, give us this bread always," so that they could have access to this never-failing supply of nourishment.

But when we pick up in today's lesson from John, we start in kind of an awkward way. Just like we've read about so many times in John's colleagues, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus was rebuffed when he was on a roll. As he continued to gradually reveal the true nature of his identity and work, some of the people started losing interest on account of the fact that they knew his family. John reports that they say: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" And honestly, it's a fair question. After all, it's not like they were there when the Angel Gabriel made the Annunciation to Mary. And they certainly would not have known what John told us in Chapter 1 of his book about the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us to be a light that cast out darkness. But even if we can forgive those speaking with Jesus for having incomplete information about him, Jesus was apparently not in the mood to prove his divine provenance by way of genealogy. In fact, he doubles down on his divine origin by saying that anyone drawn to him is drawn to them by the will of the Father. It's kind of a genius move, honestly. They question how he can say that he's the bread of heaven, and he simply responds by saying its only because Heaven is finally calling the shots that they can even have this conversation with him.

He said to them: "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day."

And there, we hear Christ's true power and authority, which he showed in that amazing meal with the five thousand and on the water, come together with his teaching about the bread of

life. They had wanted to make him king, to be an earthly ruler because he had taken care of them in ways their current regimes had not. But it turns out that his power and authority well surpassed that of the kings around him. They trafficked in the shell game of mortal authority; of regulating scarcity and managing sin and death, like arranging the existential deck chairs on the doomed HMS Titanic of the usual state of the moral universe. Jesus by contrast, as the bread of life, is the gift from heaven for the life of the world, and he is the King of Life, not of death. What he heavily implied in last week's lesson he made explicit in today's lesson, that eating the bread of life is to participate in eternal life; to enjoy that which Christ would accomplish on Easter morning which is nothing less than the new life of the Resurrection. Recall last week when the folks talking with Jesus looked back to Moses and the Manna in the desert as a paradigm for God's provision even as Jesus recalled the episode as a reminder of Israel's lack of fidelity. As good as the manna in the wilderness was for that season in which it fell, it still lacked that property that the body of Christ guarantees: life beyond the grave and gate of death. Again, he told them, "This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven."

God the Father was drawing people to His Son, Jesus. And in meeting the Son, they were coming face to face with the One whose mastery over the shape of the cosmos was sufficient to cancel the icy grip of death over human existence, indeed over all of existence. Which seems like kind of a lot to digest on a lazy, rainy summer morning, but beloved, that is what Christ has offered to us in the bread of his body and the cup of his blood. And I think it's worth our consideration and meditation this morning that just as Jesus told the folks gathered around him that the Father was drawing people to Jesus to enjoy his ministry and come to know the fullness of who he is, that we are all still being drawn to Christ even now, so that we can enjoy the fruits of the life he gave us in the Resurrection, and indeed to enjoy the Eternal life of God even in the course of our everyday lives.

My friends, in preparing our hearts to receive the very bread of life this morning, know that the life we are given for the rest of the week is adorned with Eternity. We have been given the opportunity to provide, encourage, care, love, and bless all that God puts in front of us, each one of us representing Christ's love in every place. I pray that as we live out what new life Christ gives as bread of life and Messiah of God, that we keep Paul's encouragement to the Ephesians at the top of our minds. He wrote "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Thus, as Heaven's eternity finds purchase on our hearts this very morning, this very moment, I pray that our lives would be lived for the life of the world.

To Christ be all glory from Age to Age. Amen.