

**Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish**  
**Saint Francisville, LA**  
**12 August 2018**

**John 6:51-58**

Many of you know that I enjoy watching television when I have the time. Television offers us a window into the culture of the day and allows us to see what has become important to American culture, what has fallen into disrepair, the kinds of things young people are interested in, the types of issues that cause anxiety, how Americans view issues of faith and religion, etc. When you watch closely, television can show you a slice of American life in just a few minutes.

One of the things that I have noticed over the last 20 years is the growing number of shows about food. Food preparation and serving has become a fascinating subject for television audiences and every network wants a slice of the food business. You always knew that PBS had great food shows. After all, they introduced us to American Test Kitchen and to Julia Childs. What you didn't know is that nationwide PBS broadcasts over 200 food and cooking shows. And virtually all major networks follow suit. ABC has "The Chew", FOX has "Hell's Kitchen," Food Network shows like "Chopped", "Next Food Star", and "The Pioneer Woman" are ratings gold. BRAVO has Top Chef and CBS has the Rachael Rae show. The TRAVEL CHANNEL has Bizarre Foods and TLC has Cake Boss with Buddy Valastro. We are obsessed with the idea of food. We even have an adjective to describe folks with a particularly sophisticated palate. We call them "Foodies". Food is everywhere and it seems as though everyone has just become obsessed with it.

Interestingly enough, the people in Jesus' day were also fairly concerned about food. In fact, Jesus himself has been talking about bread for the last few Sundays. The entire chapter 6 of the Gospel of John is one long presentation about food, bread in particular. The chapter begins with the feeding of the five thousand, after which Jesus travels to Capernaum, hoping to get a bit of rest. When he arrives there, the crowds quickly follow. Jesus then begins a lengthy discussion about bread. He says to them, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (25.) He then begins a lengthy discussion about food that spoils and satisfies only for a short while, and food that endures to eternal life and produces that eternal life. There are two types of bread: the bread that comes from the world, which feeds the world, but has the potential to spoil and which satisfies only momentarily. The second type of bread is the bread sent down

from heaven by God. This bread gives life to the world, a life that will never end, a life that starts here and continues after we are dead. The followers chased Jesus because they wanted the first type of bread, whereas Jesus wants nothing more than to give them the second bread.

The first bread is anything that satisfies our physical needs. This bread is extremely important and we should work hard to secure it. Jesus affirms the importance of this bread. He starts this sermon about food with a miraculous meal. What Jesus says is that this bread is not all there is. In fact, this bread only satisfies momentarily. This bread, whether it is great food, great possessions, great homes and cars... whatever this bread may look like, is transitory and we can't take it with us when we die. We have to leave this bread behind, either to spoil or to be used by others. This bread satisfies in the here and now, but it will have no use to us after our life on earth is over and our journey is done.

Jesus says that there is another type of bread. The bread sent down by God for the life of the world. This bread is Jesus himself, given for us, sent to the cross for us, made sacramental food for us. Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Those who were listening took Jesus quite literally. In their minds they thought Jesus was teaching contrary to the regulations in the Law of Moses against eating certain types of flesh and drinking blood. In fact, the expression "Flesh Eater" is used in the Old Testament as a metaphor for hostile action or to speak about the devil. The drinking of blood was also seen as something forbidden by God's law (Gn 9:4; Lv 3:17; Dt 12:23; Ac 15:20). It represented brutal slaughter, (Jeremiah 46:10), and judgement. So, when Jesus said, "unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you" the Jews thought Jesus was talking about eating his physical flesh and drinking his blood, which were expressly forbidden by Jewish law. They took him quite literally, and failed to see the metaphorical meaning of his speech.

The metaphor of bread and food can be made a bit more general. In a way, what Jesus is telling us is quite simple: There are two world views, fueling two different lifestyles. The first worldview is one that simply says: "The one with most toys wins." This worldview divides humanity into winners and losers. The winners are prosperous, have an abundance of privilege and wealth, have the choice foods and the finest clothes, have achieved great fame and status, have power and command respect. This worldview tells us the purpose of life is found in the acquisition of endless amounts of shiny toys, endless amounts of education, endless amounts of self-exploration, endless amounts of making ourselves the center of the universe. This is the bread of literalism, easy answers for hard questions, black and white thinking, self-righteous individualism, and our

need for absolute certainty about everything. It is the bread that tells us that this life is all there is and we must eat, drink, and be merry because there is no tomorrow in the horizon when today is done.

The second worldview tells us: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and all else will be given to you in due time.” This second worldview tells us that life is all about relationships and doing the will of God. The only possession worth our life is the possession of God’s Son. He who has the Son in his or her heart has a treasure that goes beyond anything we can ever quantify, measure, or catalogue. The Son of God is the food that feeds the hungry soul and leads to hope and eternal life. This food is the food of eternity, a food that once received never dies, but rather it produces abundant life forever. This is the food that makes forgiveness possible, makes joy complete, makes life bearable, and makes relationships life-giving. This is the food that conquers all fears, eliminates all hopelessness, heals all wounds, vanquishes all anxiety, ends all bitterness, forgives all sins, exiles all guilt and shame, fuels our faith, gives us strength for the journey, and guides us safely home. This is the food that accepts mystery and is comfortable with faith. This is the food of knowing that we are surrounded by overwhelming love and that although we don’t understand God’s ways, God is ultimately in charge and he will guide us safely home.

Today, the Son of God offers himself for us as food and drink, so that by eating and drinking we may obtain the life that never fades. Come and eat, come and drink, the food we are about to serve is God’s mysterious answer to our hunger and thirst for relevance, purpose, and meaning. This food we are about to eat is holy food and holy drink. Come and share with us and your Lord and Savior will do the rest. Amen!