

Introduction: Good morning, and welcome to Chapel. My name is Kerry Kuehn; I am a Professor in the Physics Department here at Wisconsin Lutheran College.

Overview: Our chapel theme for this week is “The I AM’s of Jesus”. Today we will look at the sixth chapter of John, in which Jesus teaches that He is “The Bread of Life.”

For our liturgy, we will be using the order of Morning Devotion (number one) on page nineteen in your white service bulletin. After the invocation and prayer, we will sing together hymn 338. Please rise.

God, our Father, each day is a gift of your grace.

Your mercies are new every morning.

Guide our steps by the light of your Word.

Shield us from harm and keep us from evil.

Better than life is your love.

Put joy in our hearts and praise on our lips. Alleluia!

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to this new day. Defend us with your mighty power, and grant that this day we neither fall into sin nor run into any kind of danger; and in all we do, direct us to what is right in your sight, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. **Amen**

You may be seated as we sing hymn 338.

Chapel talk: Our text for today is from the Gospel of John, chapter six. In this text, Jesus is engaged in a dialogue with a large crowd of Jews. This dialogue is sometimes called Jesus' "Bread of Life" discourse. The reason for this will be seen in a moment.

But first, by way of context: Jesus had just performed one of his most public and stunning miracles—feeding a crowd of some five thousand people with only a small helping of bread and fish. Jesus and his disciples had then left behind the crowd and crossed over to the city of Capernaum on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The crowd followed Him, and here is where we pick up the text.

As you listen, you might pay particular attention to the connections—or the parallels—that are being made between the feeding of the five thousand by Jesus, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the feeding of the Israelites in the desert with manna from heaven, after their harrowing escape from Egypt.

Now since this dialogue between Jesus and the crowd is somewhat long, what I will do is I will read the first half of the dialogue. Then I will offer some commentary. And, finally, I will conclude by reading the second half. So from John Chap. 6:

“When [the crowd] found [Jesus] on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval.”

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the One he has sent.”

So they asked him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “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. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

At this the Jews began to grumble about Him because He said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”

This testy exchange that occurs between the crowd of Jews and Jesus is both wonderful and unsettling. It is wonderful to those who trust in Him, and it is unsettling to those who do not. And it appears that the crowd had both types of people in it.

It is important to note at the outset that this conversation occurs (we are told) during the interval of time between two Feasts of commemoration: the Feast of the Passover, on the one hand, and the Feast of Tabernacles, on the other. This bracketing, so to speak, is significant.

The Passover, you will recall, was a yearly commemoration of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The Exodus was preceded by terrifying signs and wonders—stones and fire from the sky, plagues and thick darkness over the land.

The Feast of Tabernacles, you may also recall, was a yearly commemoration of the Jews wandering in the desert for forty long years after the Exodus. During this time in the desert (and this is the point I'd like to emphasize) God provided food for his people—bread from heaven—in the form of *manna*. When the Jews first saw the manna, they said: “What is it?”. The word *manna* actually comes from a Hebrew term meaning “What is it”? The manna was mysterious. They did not know what it was, or where it came from.

It is clear that the Jews remembered the stories of the Exodus. But the Exodus was some 1500 years ago by now. And their memory was apparently inaccurate. Or perhaps they were not taught correctly by their elders.

In any case, it seemed that they now wished to set up a kind of competition between Jesus and Moses. “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will *you* do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert.” In other words, Who is greater, you or Moses?

And how did Jesus respond? “It is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven”

Jesus reminds them that it was not Moses, but rather God Himself who provided them with manna. With bread from heaven. Not fiery stones from heaven, as he had rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah. Not fire and stones from from heaven, as he had given the Egyptians in His righteous wrath before the Exodus. But bread from heaven, in mercy.

This bread from heaven, that the Lord had provided for his people in the desert, was not merely food for their bellies. It foreshadowed the true bread that would come down from heaven some 1500 years later, in a manger in Bethlehem. And it is this that Jesus now points to:

“I Am the Bread of Life”. “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life.”

At these words, we are told, the Jews began to grumble because Jesus said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They grumbled:

“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”

The parallelism here is wonderful. Just as the Jews grumbled against God in the desert, *despite* the fact that God was providing for them, so too these Jews were now grumbling against *Jesus* despite the fact that He had just provided for them.

And just as when the manna fell from heaven and the Jews asked “What is it?” So, too, with Jesus, the Jews now ask “Who is He?” “Who is this Jesus?” “Where is he from?” “Where is he going?” Such questions recur many times in this Chapter.

Who is Jesus? He tells them: I Am The Bread of Life. Where is he from? He tells them: I have come down from Heaven. Where is he going? He will soon tell them: He is going to the cross to suffer and die and rise again. Soon— on the passover of the following year—all of this will be made very clear.

But, for now, while talking to this crowd in Capernaum on the coast of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus’ time had not yet come. Jesus’ time had not yet come to offer his body on the cross as a sacrifice for their sins, and the sins of the whole world. Jesus’ time had not yet come to institute the Holy Supper, the Lord’s Supper, during which he continues to give His People His very body and blood as food and drink.

But in the mean time, Jesus now speaks to the crowd and draws their attention to Himself and calls them to have Faith in Him. And this Faith is not unattainable. It is not unattainable because He draws us to Himself by his Words and by His promise of eternal life. Jesus beckons to the unbelievers in the crowd, drawing them... and here we conclude our reading of the text from John Chapter 6:

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only He has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I Am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I Am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.” He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

Please rise for prayer: Today in our prayers...

And we join in Luther's morning prayer. **I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen**

Blessing: May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself. may the power of the Lord Jesus make us strong to do his will. May the peace of the Lord Jesus fill our lives. **Amen**