

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

August 8, 2021

Psalm 34:1–8 (ESV):

1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!

4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
5 Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.
6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles.
7 The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

First Reading: 1 Kings 19:1–8 (ESV):

Elijah Flees Jezebel

19 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” 3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take

away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

EPISTLE: Ephesians 4:17–5:2 (ESV):

The New Life

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Walk in Love

5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

THE GOSPEL - John 6:35–51 (ESV):

35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” 42 They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” 43 Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 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 will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Sermon 32 – Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

“Who's the God Here?”

John 6:35-51

Dear friends,

Our Gospel lesson comes from John, and it shows us a side of Jesus that you see sometimes. This is not Jesus the gracious shepherd. This is not Jesus the healer of men, we just saw that in the previous chapters where Jesus feeds the five thousand. This is Jesus the deliverer of hard truth, truth that doesn't want to be heard. Jesus isn't deliberately misleading people here, but He is making no effort whatsoever to make what He has to say easy to understand. Everything He says is true, and what He is saying is rather simple, but how He says it pushes the Jews into uncomfortable places for a very good reason. A while back I talked about God as the divider, the one who separates true from false. This is Jesus the divider, the one who separates true hearts from false hearts, and He does it by being deliberately difficult. Jesus isn't interested in placating the Jews, He's trying to rile them up, get them to come out with their selfishness and their idolatry. Obviously He wants to save them, but these words are hard truth they don't want to hear. Again, what Jesus is actually saying is dead simple: Jesus is saying that He is God, and that He is here to bring eternal life to all who believe in Him. That's as simple as it gets. But He gets there in a confrontational and difficult way.

This chapter starts with Jesus feeding the five thousand and crossing the Sea of Galilee. The crowds follow Him to the other side, and it becomes clear from their questions that they are mostly interested in another handout. They want Jesus to make more bread. Jesus uses this as a starting point to get them to see their real need, they need salvation from their sins, not bread for their flesh. However, the Jews completely miss the direction Jesus is going. They want their bread, so they keep pushing. Jesus decides to push back.

“35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have

seen me and yet do not believe. **37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.**” Instead of bread to feed the body that perishes, you should be seeking bread that feeds your soul, and that's me, Jesus says. But you don't believe it. And the Jews don't. Why? You could say they're fixated on earthly things, on what's in front of them, their hunger here and now. That's fair enough, and it is something that afflicts all of us. We are all guilty of focusing on the problems of today instead of the blessings of the future that Jesus keeps promising all of us. Today's problems always seem worse, they always seem more urgent. That's a fair enough criticism, but Jesus is trying to show them that He is God and that faith in Him is what matters most. The Jews take issue with both.

“41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ 42 They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” 43 Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”

Jesus is in Law mode here, He is preaching the hard truth, and the hard truth is that He is deliberately calling out those that don't believe in Him. He does it while maintaining His goal, notice that. He keeps talking about how this is all about resurrection, raising people to eternal life on the last day. The folks here that believe in me, Jesus says, are here because God is calling them here. They are not here because they're perfect, they are not here because their faith is so awesome or their works are so virtuous. They're here because God is calling, and when God calls, the faithful answer. Jesus is implying that if the Jewish leaders – the Pharisees and such – believed in Him they wouldn't be asking these questions. Jesus is forcing His opponents to reveal that they don't believe Him. They don't believe He's God, and they don't believe Jesus is speaking the truth. They've just confessed it. They don't think Jesus comes from heaven, they think Jesus comes from Mary and Joseph. They've missed the boat.

But Jesus isn't doing this to be mean or cruel, Jesus is condemning their unbelief to show them the error of their ways and their thinking. He's letting them hang themselves on their own noose to get them to see what the truth really is. How can I say that? Look at the next verses. Jesus keeps offering the promise, He keeps offering Himself, He keeps showing that He what you must trust in to be saved. He is God, and He is here to save sinners. Jesus won't stop saying that. **“45 It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life.”** The door is still open. Whoever believes has eternal life, start believing. I'm God and I'm here, and I'm here to offer myself, my body, for the salvation of the world. Your sins come from you, and I'm here to take those sins in my body and have them killed so that you can live again. The Old Testament itself says, everyone will be taught by God. Jesus is God, and Jesus is standing right in front of them teaching them. He's teaching them that they have to let go.

Let go of what, though? What is the big problem here? Is it the fact that they're just wanting bread? Not really. Jesus has just fed people that needed bread, He sees these people as a sheep without a shepherd, and so he leads them to still waters and green pastures and feeds them out of the compassion of His heart. It's not the bread that's the problem, we all need it. It is the insistence on my way. That is what Jesus is challenging here, and that is what the Jews cannot let go of. They have to have it their way. Their way is clear, very political, and doesn't involve a Nazareth general contractor who insists that He is God. Their way leaves out Jesus. Their way is all about themselves and their work.

This is sin. This is our perennial condition. It has to be my way, God. It has to be according to my will, what I want, and my schedule. The Jews took this into salvation in a way we Lutherans don't. They thought that the Messiah had to look different, be different. They thought that Jesus couldn't possibly be God. Finally, they thought that

faith, that belief, wasn't nearly as important as the laws, the customs, and the lifestyle they'd taught their whole lives. This is so subtle, brothers and sisters, because what the Pharisees taught was not 100% made up. It wasn't. It was based on the Old Testament, God's own word, it was based on what God actually really wanted His people to do. But there was just enough of their own spin, their own opinions, and their own ego to make it a problem, and they'd lost sight of that. They'd lost sight of God, and the real mission God had in mind for His Jewish nation: Looking forward to Jesus. They forgot that they were supposed to be the nation of promises, and they forgot that one day God would keep His promise to send His son to be their savior. When that Son stood in front of them, they didn't see Him.

This is far from a Jewish problem, and it is something we are all susceptible to. It's not that we're distracted, it's that our needs make us feel like we know what God should do, and make it so that we become God and start dictating to Him. Sometimes this goes into salvation, that God should be doing this or that to save people, or that God isn't saving people at all, so we need to do this or that to be appealing to people so they can be saved. We get full of ourselves and think that we're the one that has to draw people in, we're the one that has to be all in all, forgetting what Jesus says repeatedly throughout this Gospel lesson. God calls His faithful. When people gather, they gather around Jesus because and only because Jesus has called them to do so. We think we have to do it. Whether its solving life's problems, or fixing the church, we think God should do it our way, and if He won't do it our way, He needs to get out of the way and let us do it our way.

Why do we think this? Because the need seems there, and the need seems self-evident. Our fears and mistrust are behind those needs. God, I don't have what I need, why are you not providing it? I guess I need to provide it for myself. God, if I don't get what I need, horrible things are going to happen, get out of the way so I can make sure they don't! That's backwards. Our needs don't demand anything. We think they do,

because they're important to us, but they really don't. Furthermore, our Father in heaven knows our needs far better than we do and are far better equipped to meet those needs than we ever will be. God is God, and when we get scared, we try to muscle Him out of the way and make ourselves God, because we don't want this or that to happen. That's exactly what the Jews were doing in John. They weren't doing it because they were scared, but that doesn't matter, they were still crossing their arms and telling Jesus, no, you're not good enough. You're not what we wanted, not what we expected, so you can't be God, and you can't be here to save us.

“49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” Jesus never stops offering this, to you and to every heart. No matter how we push God out of the way, He pushes His way back in, and these words remind you of that. He is here to push His way into you, specifically, through your mouth. He is here to take His actual flesh that was actually crucified and make it actually work salvation in you through you eating that flesh with your teeth and breaking it down with your stomach acid. All of these things are as they are, and why? Because Jesus knows you don't trust Him. Jesus knows you feel like you need to save yourself. He knows you're a sheep without a shepherd, always trying to go off course because you feel like its the right thing to do. He knows what you need and He knows what you need most is to feed on Him. Literally. Why? Because you'll die. One day, whether it be tomorrow or in 80 years, you'll die, and when you die, you'll face Him. In the end, that is all that matters. Jesus promises that for those that feed on Him, for those that believe in Him, your death won't be final. It'll be just like stepping through a doorway into paradise.

The Jews thought Jesus couldn't be God, He was just a man. They thought they had to do it themselves. We know Jesus is God, but we lose track of what that means. He's our God, taking care of us through cross and trial. He's our God, here to get us to die

believing in Him, and that this matters more than anything that happens in this life. We push Him out of the way, but He pushes His way back in, pushes us back into believing Him no matter what happens. Stop trying to push God out, if that's your thing. It's certainly mine. Or stop thinking we have to do it all ourselves. We're not the stars here. We're not the Savior, and we don't call the shots. He does. Take and eat, He'll call you through it, keep you going one more week through it.

Amen