

[Music] Waiting for those kids in the back.

As we gather on this 12th Sunday after Pentecost, we are well into a meditation in John's Gospel about bread of life.

And you might think you're hearing the same material repeated, but what you're hearing is an invitation into greater depth.

And the commentators that I consult have been very helpful about saying that the questions we're asking shift with each time we come around to this theme of bread of life.

So that we started with that story of the feeding, wondering how are we going to feed these people to Jesus talking about being bread of life?

What sort of bread?

Today we ask what sort of life?

Spoiler alert, eternal life.

Problem.

What does that mean?

We'll fuss with that a little bit today.

I'm happy you're here for a cooler day.

I don't have to be mad at what you're supposed to do and not do when it's so hot in the building.

But if you want to still do that stuff, that's fine.

I won't stop.

So as we get there, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

I'll see you.

[Music] (soft music) (soft music)

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John, the sixth chapter.

Jesus said to the people, "I am the bread of life.

"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, "and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Then the people began to murmur about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

They were saying, "Is this not Jesus, "the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

"How can he now say I have come down from heaven?"

And Jesus answered, "Do not murmur among yourselves.

"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."

"It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught by God."

Everyone who has heard and learned from the father comes to me.

Not that anyone has seen the father, except the one who is from God.

He has seen the father.

Truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

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.

Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.

And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh, the gospel of our Lord.

(Praying) Grace and peace to you.

That murmuring you hear echoes clear back to liberated people on the run.

They had bread from heaven, manna, and they were quite happy about it for a while until they weren't.

Human nature, I guess.

But what's the murmuring about when Jesus, after having fed multitudes and having baskets left over, what's their beef?

The commentators that I consult frequently for, especially John's Gospel, are helpful on this score.

Dr.

Caroline Lewis says, "Look to the end of this passage."

And then things start to make sense when you work them forward.

So it is legitimate to look in the answer key in the back of the book.

It didn't used to be, but now it is.

How did things end?

Well, by the time Jesus had gone from offering bread and offering himself and speaking of eternal life and being the bread that came from heaven, the questions got more strident and the reactions more intense so that at one point the crowds left, many of Jesus' followers left, and that left Jesus and his inner circle and he asked of them, "So are you leaving as well?"

Anybody know what the disciples said in reply to that?

Well, we didn't exactly sing it this morning, but we have sung it before.

"Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go?"

You have the words of eternal life.

Jesus speaks an eternal word about eternal life.

And the scandal of it all is that on one hand it's very human, it's very real world.

It's as real as Mary and Joseph's son, it's as real as the bread we gnaw on, and yet it's this thing that is beyond, this eternal thing.

It's maybe more than we can swallow, and it shouldn't be a surprise that people left the table.

When Jesus speaks about eternal life, there were many Israelites who didn't even believe in a resurrection at all, so when Jesus says he's the resurrection on the last day, maybe that is a claim too far.

So you're telling us there is a resurrection and you're doing the resurrecting.

But what is it that Jesus is inviting people into with this kind of resurrection?

Well, it's clear on the last day there will be this eternal life beyond that time when we take our last breath.

Maybe that level is how long eternal lasts, and I used to think eternal was that interval between getting to school in the morning and the first recess at about 10.15.

So that's my introduction to the theory of relativity when it comes to time.

But eternity, how can we possibly fathom eternity and infinity?

We think it's a big deal that there are buildings that have been standing for maybe four or five thousand years.

That's just a glimmer of infinity and eternity.

So for someone to speak about life that goes on like that has to be difficult to accept.

But there's another level that eternity operates.

And again, it's a matter of reading backwards.

It's a matter of reading in hindsight.

In the beginning was the Word.

The Word was God.

The Word was God.

That Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace, full of truth.

So eternal life is also that presence of God in every breath we take, not just beyond the last breath we take.

Jesus would often use a word to dwell, to abide, to remain.

It's the same word that you heard a minute ago.

The Word became flesh and it dwelled.

It remained.

That Word would abide with us.

And Jesus would say to his followers to abide in him, and he would abide in them in the same way that a branch gets its vitality and its life from a main limb.

Jesus is speaking about God's eternal presence in the now and beyond the now.

We may not have any better luck wrapping our heads around it than the murmurers in Jesus' presence, or maybe the murmurers in the Sinai Desert.

Human nature.

However, we do get the opportunity to look back.

And maybe that's something that the direction to which we look is unique.

Because if we look back, we do so from the vantage point of the resurrection.

Maybe from the vantage point of the beach where Jesus and his followers were after he had been raised from the dead.

And at that point at which they shared fish breakfast, and Jesus would say to Peter, "Almost working Peter's denials in reverse."

Peter, you are forgiven.

You are restored.

You are entrusted.

Where Jesus would say to his followers, "Take care of each other, and feed all of those whom I consider my sheep."

That's where we stand when we look back at Jesus' words about eternal life.

When John writes that end of his gospel, it's all about thinking of the next generations.

It's thinking about eternal life moving futureward.

John would say, "There are a lot of things that Jesus said and did that didn't even get written down, the ones that are written down are written down so that we may believe, that we may have life in his name."

And that promise totally upends our notion of belonging, belonging to past only, to now belonging to past and present and future, that is another facet of eternal life.

That God embraces us all across time and across culture, and offers us the bread of life, the words of life.

And so it is that we sing together, "Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go?"

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia and Amen.

[Music] [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music]