

**Pentecost 10B – Proper 14 (8/9/09 – *The Flesh of Christ Given for the Life of the World*)**

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Have you ever been listening to someone – a coworker, a teacher, a newscaster, a pastor – and gotten caught up on something he said ... and become so preoccupied with that little point that you didn't really hear anything else? That's what seems to be happening in our *Gospel* for today. Jesus is proclaiming to the crowd gathered before Him – to those who had been part of His miraculous feeding the day before ... plus those sick they carried to Him that He might heal them – Jesus is speaking gracious, life-giving, saving words ... and saying: ***I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst. ... All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out. ... 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. 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.*** [JN 6.35, 37, 39-40] But after speaking such gracious words – promising them salvation, eternal life, and the resurrection – what is it that we hear in verse 41? ***So the Jews grumbled about Him, because He said, “I am the Bread that came down from heaven.”*** [6.41]

Now, first of all, let me correct these grumblers a bit. Remember how last week – just a few verses before our text for today – we heard Jesus say: ***Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but My Father 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.*** [6.32-33] I drew our attention to the present tense of the verbs: ***GIVES ... COMES DOWN.*** The Father ***continually GIVES*** us ***the True Bread from Heaven***, our Lord Jesus Christ ... through Word and Sacrament – still today. And our Lord Jesus Christ, ***the Bread of God, continually COMES down from heaven and [continually] gives life to the world*** – still today. But the Jews who grumbled about Jesus grumbled that He had said, ***I am the Bread that CAME down from heaven.*** As if it were all just in the past ... as if He had only “once upon a time” been in heaven, and now is permanently stuck here on earth ... never to return to heaven ... never to come down again and again. What a big difference the right understanding of something as seemingly small as the change from present to past tense can make.

***So the Jews grumbled about Him.*** And they went on to point to the things they had seen and known about Him. ***This Man is only Jesus ... that Carpenter from Nazareth Who is*** (they supposed) ***the son of Joseph.*** ***We know His parents – earthly parents.*** So ... ***How does He now say, “I have come down from heaven?”*** And Jesus' response? He talks about faith. ***Do not grumble among yourselves.***

[6.43] It's as if our Lord would say: *Who is this who darkens My counsel with vain words? Do you not know that I know what you are thinking – what you are trying to say behind My back ... as if I didn't know ... as if I didn't hear ... indeed, as if I didn't know before you even speak? Stop your grumbling. You will not logic this out. Believing in Me – Faith in Me – does not come by mere intellectual reasoning. In fact, your darkened, sin-infected reason will undoubtedly arrive at the wrong conclusions. **No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him.** Which is to say, no one believes in Me unless the Father first does His work to create (and sustain) that faith. So don't just look at what you see with your eyes – there's much more to Me: Gospel things ... eternal things ... divine and blessing and life-giving things.*

We **all** have this problem. It shows up in every aspect of our lives. Elijah had it – this looking at what we **think** we see ... then doubting God. In our *Old Testament* [1KGS 19.1-8] we have the account of Elijah fleeing from the evil Queen Jezebel. She has vowed to put Elijah to death – just as he had put to death all of the false, evil prophets who had led the children of Israel away from the One True God to worship baal and asherah. You know the story. All morning the 450 prophets of baal prayed to their false **un-god** to light with fire the sacrifice they had prepared. At midday Elijah mocked them: ***Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened*** [18.27]. But baal did not answer – since he could not. When Elijah's turn comes, he has the assistants pour a total of 12 waterpots of water over the sacrifice and wood ... until it has drenched everything and filled the trench dug around it. And when Elijah prays to the One True God, ***the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench*** [18.38]. Then Elijah executed the false prophets by the Brook Kishon [18.40].

But here he is (now that Jezebel has threatened his life) scurrying away ... hiding – as if God could not easily protect him. Elijah is afraid and has given up. He sees only the outward circumstances – so quickly he has forgotten the power of God. ***It is enough***, he says – ***I've had it, I give up – now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers*** [19.4]. And despite taking his eyes off of His almighty God, Elijah the prophet speaks the truth. We are – none of us – ***better than*** our ***fathers***. We are all sinners – conceived and born in sin – struggling with sin our whole lives ... and all too often succumbing to its deceitful desires. As Christians we try to put off our old, corrupt selves – but all too often we walk in sinfulness. We lose heart ... give up – the Church is lost ... the Preschool is lost ... the economy is lost ... there is no hope. Our minds think futile thoughts because our understanding is darkened by our ignorant, sinful flesh. Our

hearts become hardened again ... our spirits refuse to be renewed, recreated. We don't walk *in true righteousness and holiness* [EPH 4.17-24].

But then Christ, the True, Living, and Life-Giving Bread, *comes down from heaven again* ... and gives us to eat of His divine, heavenly Manna *again ... so that one may eat of it – eat of HIM – and not die* [JN 6.50]. This, dear Christian friends, is no trivial Word from the mouth of our Lord. When Christ says: *For I have come down from heaven, not to do My Own will but the will of Him Who sent Me* ... namely, *that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the Last Day* ... and *that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life* [6.38-40], Christ is speaking about His incarnation ... He is speaking about His earthly ministry in our stead and on our behalf ... and He is speaking about His continued ministry through Word and Sacrament to give us the forgiveness, life, and salvation He has purchased and won for us **by** His incarnate life, death, and resurrection. Here we see our Lord as the Second and Perfect Adam – a True Man consisting of a reasonable soul and human flesh, as we confess on the basis of Holy Scripture (in the *Athanasian Creed*). Here we see a faithful Elijah. The Jews took offense at Christ's humanity; but it is that very humanity – united to His divinity in the *personal union* – that enables our Savior to act in our stead and on our behalf as the Bread of Heaven to give us eternal life.

But then, the mundane seems unfit for the things of God – so thinks our human reason. Body and soul are in completely separate realms – flesh and spirit have nothing to do with one another. These are old errors – ancient heresies, in fact – that run contrary to God's Holy Word. For God has created both our body and our soul (and spirit). Our fleshly and our spiritual lives are not two separate lives – it's not that God has our ear on Sundays ... the world the rest of the week. We belong to the Lord – body and soul, flesh and spirit – all the time. And it is God Who sustains and nourishes us both in body and in soul. So God the Son comes down from heaven – from God the Father's side, as it were, begotten before all worlds – and takes into Himself flesh and blood, soul and spirit. Thus True God becomes True Man – body-and-soul/flesh-and-spirit/divinity-and-humanity ... all united in One Christ ... as the Bread of Life coming down from heaven to give His life to the world ... **to us**.

In **our** flesh, Christ the Son of God walks in the manner worthy of the children of God – **for us**. In **our** flesh, Jesus' heart does not harden ... His senses do not become callous ... He does not give Himself over to sensuality and greed, nor become corrupted through deceitful desires. In **our** flesh, our Savior walks *in true righteousness and holiness* all His days ... loving us and giving *Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* [EPH 5.2] – **all for us!**

This *journey is too great for* us to walk alone ... on our own. But we are not alone! *The Angel of the LORD*, Jesus Christ, comes to us again and again, saying: *Arise and eat ... take, drink.* And *in the strength of* the heavenly Food that Christ the Bread of Life gives us – His Gospel-Word ... His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins in the Sacrament – we journey not just forty days and nights ... but forever. For Jesus says: *Truly, truly, I say to you* – so listen up, dear saints, as your Savior reveals to you a deep and most blessed truth – *whoever believes HAS eternal life.* [6.47] You **already** possess the eternal life purchased for you by your Bread of Life Who comes down from heaven and gives His Flesh for the life of the world. Already now – though your flesh appears so weak ... falling into sin ... ever succumbing to the ravages of disease ... walking toward death – **already now** this weak flesh is the possessor of life eternal! And on the Last Day you shall be raised up and all that is weak in you shall be perfectly strong ... all that is sin in you shall be re-created in perfect righteousness and holiness ... and you shall live in the presence of the Bread of Life ... beholding His very life-giving Flesh ... and His glorious Face ... forever.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the + SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]