

“The Flesh and Blood Jesus is the Only Way to Salvation”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I'm sure you've heard someone say, "I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious." It's an attack on organized religion. It seems especially aimed at the Christian church. Maybe you've been tempted to say that yourself? Especially when we hear of the horrific abuses by clergy in Pennsylvania. Dearly beloved, Christ instituted the church so that you might receive what He says you *must* receive in today's gospel reading. What is it that Christ says you must receive?

Unless you receive the flesh and blood Jesus into you, you have no life in you.

Jesus says in the first verse of our reading, "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 (Jn 6:51)."

When Jesus says "if anyone eats of this bread," there are two things going on.

First Jesus is talking about a spiritual eating. In other words, you receive Jesus by hearing the the Good News of salvation, by being baptized in that same Word, and by receiving the Lord's Supper. The flesh and blood in this context means the flesh and blood Jesus.

What form is Jesus now?

Did Jesus throw away His flesh and blood body after the ascension?

Jesus showed himself to many after His resurrection. He ate with His disciples. He told Thomas to touch Him and see that He is the same Jesus that died on the cross. Yet He is the resurrected Christ.

We, who are perishable shall put on flesh like the risen and ascended Christ. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality (1 Cor. 15:53)." This is what Jesus is talking about when He promises to raise you up on the last day (Jn 6:54).

For you body to become imperishable and immortal, it must receive Jesus.

You receive Jesus by faith alone.

Your flesh doesn't like this. Our old man likes to be spiritual and not religious.

Later in John, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6a)." Many people say amen to this. The Buddhist thinks he can have Jesus with his Buddhism. The Muslim thinks he

can have Jesus with his Islam. The Hindu thinks he can have Jesus with his Hinduism. The pagan thinks he can have Jesus with his works.

Jesus doesn't give you this option.

He immediately continues with, "No one comes to the Father except through Me (Jn 14:6b)." Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Pagans fall away at this truth. The Christian, however, shouts AMEN to this part.

The Christian knows through the Law of God that he is a "poor miserable sinner" as we confessed at the beginning of this service. He knows that if his salvation depends on his work, he is damned. He confesses with Isaiah that all his righteous works are as filthy rags (Is. 64:6)!

Note well that Isaiah says your *righteous* works are as filthy rags.

You must receive Jesus to be counted righteous.

The works of Jesus are indeed righteous!

Jesus took on human flesh.

Jesus obeyed His Father in heaven perfectly on your behalf. The works of Jesus are counted to you as *your* righteous deeds.

Jesus sacrificed Himself on your behalf. All your sin is paid for. The sacrifice of Jesus is counted to you as full payment for your sins.

You receive Jesus through faith.

As Paul says, you "are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith (Rom. 3:24-25)."

Christ instituted the church so that you might receive Jesus through faith.

The church proclaims the Word of God in reading, preaching, and teaching so that you might receive Jesus through hearing the Word (Romans 10:17).

The church administers Holy Baptism so that you might be washed clean from all your sins (Acts 22:16, 1 Ptr 3:21).

The church administers the Holy Supper so that you might eat and drink the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

Again, Jesus says in the first verse of our reading, “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 (Jn 6:51).”

When Jesus says “if anyone eats of this bread,” there are two things going on.

The first was receiving Jesus spiritually. The second is receiving Jesus by eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

The first sense of eating bread which is Jesus’ flesh as receiving Jesus in all the means that Jesus has established, namely proclaimed Word, Baptism, and Lord’s Supper is agreed upon by all Christians.

There is disagreement on whether Jesus is talking about the Lord’s Supper specifically.

When Jesus says, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life (Jn 6:63),” many take that to mean this discourse by Jesus is not talking about the Lord’s Supper.

In a way they’re right. If a non-believer joins us at the Lord’s Supper and eats the body of our Lord and drinks His blood, they’re not automatically saved. It is true with any of the means. If a non-believer participates in hearing, baptism, or the Lord’s Supper without faith, they’re not saved. But they *do* receive the Lord’s body and blood. As Paul says, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16)?” The way Paul asks this question in the Greek leaves room for only one answer, YES!

If this true body and blood is not received in faith, then it’s eaten and drunk to one’s condemnation.

The language of eating and drinking in our Gospel reading today is very strong indeed. John talks a little differently than Matthew, Mark, Luke, or Paul about the sacraments. In John 3 he talks about being born again by the water and the Word, which clearly indicates baptism. In our passage today, he speaks of eating and drinking the Lord’s body and blood to talk about the supper that will be instituted in the future on Maundy Thursday.

Christ instituted the church so that you might abide in Him.

We have no life in ourselves. It must come to us from the outside. It comes into us through the means established by Christ. Christ doesn’t come to us only once. He continues to come to us through Word, water, bread, and wine.

You didn't receive Christ originally through works, spiritual or manual. You received Christ by faith through means outside of yourself. The Word comes into your ears and the Holy Spirit creates faith when and where He wills. The Word is applied to you by external means of water and the Holy Spirit creates faith in you. The Word comes into your mouth through bread become body and wine become blood and the Holy Spirit creates faith in you. There is only one baptism, but we return to it daily. The proclaimed word and bread-and-wine Word come to you again and again. You continue to receive Christ outside of your works, spiritual or manual.

This is a hard saying. Those who prefer to be spiritual refuse to believe it.

The Jews in our Gospel reading today say Jesus' Words are hard. Hard to accept and hard to believe.

They wrestle with Jesus saying that you must drink His blood. That is horrid to a faithful Jew's ears. Leviticus 17 is one of many places that prohibits Jews from drinking or eating blood. That prohibition is lifted although the apostles asked the Gentiles to abstain from eating meat with blood in it for a time to not offend the Jews (Acts 15).

Jesus doesn't give you the blood of animals to drink. There is no life in their blood.

Jesus gives you His own blood to drink. But not in the same way that we might drink the blood of animals.

Jesus sacramentally joins His blood with the wine so that you drink His life-giving blood.

This is a mystery as to how it works. I can't tell you how this works, nor can anyone.

But I can tell you what Jesus says about it. "Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (Jn 6:54)."

Furthermore, Jesus promises to abide with you: "Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

This is what really irritates the Jews. Jesus is the only way to the Father. He is God Himself. Jesus proves it by rising from the dead and ascending to His Father in heaven.

Jesus Christ, second Person of the Trinity, true God and true Man promises to abide in you.

You are like the tree in Psalm 1. You're planted by streams of living water and you yield fruit because of that water. Jesus is the living water. Through Him, you have life and you bear fruit.

You come to church to receive that Living Water.

This is *why* we care about the liturgy. It consists of God's Word and it is centered around two things: the proclaimed Word of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Supper where you receive the body and blood of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We don't do our own made up liturgy. We have a liturgy handed down by the Church universal which has been tested over time. This liturgy gives you what Jesus says you *must* have: Jesus Himself.

When you receive Jesus by faith, you bear the fruits of praise, thanksgiving, and fervent love towards your neighbor. These works aren't effective for your salvation. But they do show that you have a living faith. They show that Jesus abides in you. As He promised.

So, continue to receive Jesus. As Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Here at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Jesus continues to give you eternal life and He will raise you up on the last day.

May the risen and ascended Christ continue to abide in you so that you remain in the one true Faith once handed down by His apostles until you are raised bodily by Christ Himself on the last day.

In Jesus name. Amen.