Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning is John chapter 6 here re-reading these words. “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” This is our text.

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

How can this man give us his flesh to eat? The folks in Capernaum didn’t understand what Jesus was saying. And who really could blame them? “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Has Jesus taken leave of His senses? Or is He just speaking “metaphorically,” a little over the top shock and awe to get the attention of dull ears just to see if they’re listening?  
  
Jesus takes us from faith to mouth. Up until now it has been all faith talk. To eat of the Bread of Life is to believe in Jesus. Faith, like eating, draws upon all that Jesus has to give, like a grain of wheat to the eater. His vitalities, His energies, His forgiveness, His obedience and righteousness, all are yours through faith in Him. So far, so good. Eating as metaphor for faith, bread as figure of speech for Jesus. That much we can swallow without giving our reason or senses a case of indigestion.

But Jesus doesn’t stop at faith. Faith tends to be too abstract and squishy. You have met people who believe in their believing. Such great faith they have! Surely God is pleased with them. Perhaps you have said as much yourself. Faith is nothing but given to. As the eye receives light, so faith receives the gifts of Jesus. As the ear receives sound, so faith receives the forgiveness, life, and salvation that come through Jesus’ words. Faith is utterly passive, receiving, givable to. As a little child. Trusting. “Unless you become as little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” A little child, held in the arms of his mother, is the image of faith before God.

Old Adam would have you look at your faith instead of your Jesus. Admire your believing. How strong you are! How resilient! Pure of doctrine and pure of heart. A Lutheran among Lutherans no less, and how pleased God must be to number you among his sheep! But faith that looks to faith is not saving faith nor is it the faith that commends one to God. And so the metpahor and figure must give way to something more concrete. Something real. Something in your mouth. So Jesus goes from faith to the mouth, moving from believing in Him to eating His flesh and drinking His blood. And that’s where the trouble begins.

How can this man give us His flesh to eat? It’s a reasonable question. Is Jesus advocating some kind of cannibalism here? Eating flesh and drinking blood sound so terribly “unspiritual,” not to mention unscientific and even downright barbaric. Seriously! How are we to understand what Jesus is saying here? How are we supposed to feed on His flesh and drink His blood and so have His life in us? Figuratively? Metaphorically? Symbolically? Spiritually?

Jesus gives no avenues for avoiding His words. They mean what they say. He even whomps up the verb a bit just so we don’t miss eat. Feeds. Not eats. Feeds. Chews. Rends with the teeth. That sort of thing. It’s all so terribly earthy, ordinary, foodlike. Not the spiritual sort of Jesus that makes for a good Sunday morning warmup to brunch. Or the Jesus you can conveniently tuck away the rest of the week and who won’t interfere with business as usual.

But metaphorical food doesn’t satisfy, and symbolic drink will not quench thirsty souls. We are flesh and blood creatures, and we need a flesh and blood Savior. Not someone who appears to be like us (but not really) but someone who really is like us in every way. Bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh. In many ways, this sermon of Jesus in John 6 goes back to Bethlehem and to Jesus’ birth of a human mother. The Word became Flesh. The Bread that Jesus gives for the life of the world is His flesh, the flesh conceived in the Virgin’s womb, the flesh born in Bethlehem, the flesh laid in a manger, the flesh that was circumcized on the 8th day, that was obedient to his parents and to the whole law. The flesh that was nailed to the cross and laid in a tomb and raised from the dead and glorified to the right hand of the Father. “Whoever feeds on this bread, this flesh, whoever drinks of this blood, has life. The life of Christ the Incarnate Word, the One who is the Light and Life of all.

His flesh and blood are the medicine, the antidote to our Sin, the “medicine of immortality.” His flesh given into death for your sins, condemning Sin in His flesh. His blood poured out for you and for all, new covenant blood. “I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquites no longer.”

They grumbled over Jesus’s words. They were offended. He dared to speak of His flesh as food and His blood as drink. They didn’t believe who He said He was, and so they were scandalized by His words. “The Spirit gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” “Flesh gives birth to flesh,” Jesus told Nicodemus. “Spirit gives birth to spirit.” One must be born anew from above, born of water and Spirit. You are flesh born of the flesh of Adam. That you recieved from your mother and your father along with the disease of Sin. And you are spirit born for Spirit in your baptism. And it is by that Spirit that you hear, believe and recieve what Jesus has to give to you. This is not your own doing.

Your flesh born of flesh is of no help here and will get in the way. Your reason and your senses will tell you that all that there is on the altar is plain old bread and wine and nothing more. This is as far as the flesh can take you. And if flesh is all you had, then death is all you have to look forward to. But you are spirit born of Spirt in Baptism. The Father has granted you to come to His Son by faith, and that faith knows nothing but what it hears from Jesus, like sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd and follow no one else. His words are spirit and life, imparting spirit and life to those who hear. To you. Here today. The words of Jesus from mouth to ear do what they say – forgiving your sins, giving you life, granting you salvation, making you new again.

The world does not believe this, but then, how can it? The natural man cannot discern these things, St. Paul said. They are spiritual things spoken to those who have the Spirit. That bread can be the body of Christ, that wine can be His blood, is a small thing for Jesus. He conquered Death and Sin. He rose from the dead. How simple it is for Him to give you His body and His blood in a form you can rejoice and delight in. Simple bread and wine. His flesh given for the life of the world. His blood of the covenant, poured out for you.

People stopped following Jesus that day. They turned away and went back to whatever they were doing. The sacraments are always a stumbling block to unbelief. People trip over them every time. How can this man give us His flesh to eat? How can bread be body, wine be blood, water be baptism? How can a sinner forgive sins? How can a preacher’s mouth speak God’s Word? The scandal is always there. Every Sunday, beginning with the absolution.   Jesus could have kept it simple. Spiritual. Abstract. Faith stuff. But He chose in His wisdom to put His salvation into our ears and into our mouths. Faith comes by hearing. And yet Jesus not only wants to be heard, He wants to be our food and our drink. He wants to be more than information. He wants that kind of intimate communion with us that says, “I died to save you.” You. If you were the only person in this world, I would have come to save you. That death I died for all on the cross, I died for you. Take and eat. Take and drink. Taste and see that the Lord is good!

Jesus turns to His Twelve. They are His apostles in training, His church’s first pastors. “Are you going too?” Everyone else is leaving, are you going to leave too? What about you? Is this too much for you to bear as well? Peter speaks for them all, as he is wont to do. “Lord, to whom shall we go? Where else are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life.” Even when your words sound crazy, you have the words of eternal ife. Even when they stretch our reason and imagination to the snapping point, you have the words of eternal life. No one else does. There have been many wise men and women in this world. There have been many great philosophers, poets, leaders, scientists. But only One has the words of eternal life.

In a way, the Lord’s Supper is an exercise of faith in Jesus’ words. He completely hides everything and bids us to trust Him, take Him at His word. This is my Body; this is my blood. No explanations or equivocations. Just His words. Words that are Spirit and Life. Words of eternal life. Words that speak to your spirit born of Spirit in Baptism as a child of God. The Lord’s Supper is a place where He teaches us to trust Him when we cannot see for ourselves, so that when we stare into that dark pit of a grave called Death, we cling to nothing but His words. “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”

These are the words you have heard today. Blessed are you. The Father has drawn you, the Spirit has birthed you, the Son has redeemed you. Blessed are you. “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he will also live because of me. You take His body and blood with you wherever you go. To your work, to your home, to your grave. And He will raise you up on the last day.

You can count on Him to do it. He has the words of eternal life and a resurrection to prove it.

In the name of Jesus,  
Amen