

Bread of Life

GOSPEL OF JOHN SUMMER SERIES

Exodus 16:1-15 John 6:1-13, 47-58

August 29, 2021

Pastor Dave Bolte



The word “**Synoptic**” means to “*see together*”. In theology, it’s a way to describe how similar Matthew, Mark, and Luke are written. All three of those gospels “*see together*”, they write about similar things. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story of Jesus from start to finish in their own ways. They function as the Old Testament’s principle of “*2 or 3 witnesses that establish a truth*” (Deuteronomy 19:15). Because they are so similar, they are called the “*Synoptic Gospels*,” that is, they *see together*.

One example of this is with **Holy Communion**. In the *Synoptic Gospels*, Holy Communion is instituted on Maundy Thursday and we learn of the “Words of Institution” – the Small Catechism records it like this:

*The holy evangelists **Matthew, Mark, Luke**, together with St. Paul, write: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, ‘Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way also He took the cup after supper, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it all of you; this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”*

These words from Matthew, Mark, and Luke teach us that the Body and Blood of Christ is present in the bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins. These Gospels “*see together*”; they’re called the “*Synoptic Gospels*.”

But the **Gospel of John** is different; the Gospel of John is theological, John is teaching us specifically that Jesus is the *Christ*, the *Son of God*, so that by *believing* in His Name we will have *eternal life*. The way that the Gospel of John is written is different than the “*Synoptic Gospels*.” John was very selective in choosing stories of Jesus’ life to prove that He is the Christ, the Son of God, the Great I AM of the Old Testament. One example of this is how he taught us about Holy Communion.

Instead of telling us about Jesus instituting Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday and giving us the Words of Institution, John takes us back to a miracle story that Jesus did earlier in His Life where Jesus taught proleptically (= *ahead of time*) about Holy Communion. It’s the story of the **Feeding of the 5,000**. It was our gospel lesson for today.

In the Feeding of the 5,000, Jesus is providing food for people. It is an intentional echo of God providing Manna to the People of Israel in the Old Testament times. In the Old Testament times, God provided bread from Heaven (*Manna*) day by day for 40 years, but yet the people still died. In the New Testament times, Jesus will provide Bread from Heaven where those who eat will live forever. He provides Himself: He is the Bread of Life! He is the “*New Manna*”! Jesus is Living Bread from Heaven for us who were starving to death in sin!

Sin in this word picture is seen as **starving to death**. There is nothing in this world that can rescue us from death. In sin, we are like the Israelites in the wilderness. They had no food and they thought they were going to die. Our sin and guilt lead straight to death ... we are like someone who is starving to death.

But just as God provided Manna for the Israelites, and He fed 5,000 people that day in Capernaum; now, in a greater way, Jesus feeds us. He feeds us **Bread from Heaven**; the **Bread of Life**! Jesus Himself is the **Bread of Life**! Jesus Himself has come down from heaven to die on cross to give life of the world.

In this word picture, we are to **eat** the **Bread of Life**... just like the Israelites did; and just like the 5,000 at Capernaum did. You eat the **Bread of Life** in two ways.

First when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, **it is like** you are eating the **Bread of Life**. Faith is seen as a *spiritual eating*; trust is taking the **Bread of Life** into yourself. When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will live forever. Jesus’ death and resurrection gives you eternal life. That’s the Gospel Good News that we believe! In John chapter 6, **faith and trust** in Christ is **pictured** as a “spiritual eating” of the **Bread of Life**. The **Bread of Life** is a **metaphor** for faith.

The second way that you **eat** the **Bread of Life** is in **Holy Communion**¹. Holy Communion is a *Sacramental eating*. Remember the word *sacrament* means *mystery*; in a *mysterious* way, according to Jesus’ own Words and promises, **we eat His flesh² and drink His Blood**.

¹ This understanding of John 6 is highly debated, even among conservative Lutherans in the LCMS. This sermon teaches a Sacramental understanding of Jesus’ words, especially since He is emphasizing it 7 times in 7 verses!! Jesus is teaching proleptically about Holy Communion like He did about His resurrection in John 2:19-22, and Holy Baptism in John 3. If you would like to see a quick summary of reasons why some do not interpret John 6 sacramentally, please email me and I will send it to you.

² For most of us, Jesus saying that we are to “eat His flesh” probably catches us by surprise. We are used to the words “Take and eat, this is My Body”, not His flesh. But, “body” and “flesh” are synonyms. In fact, in the early Church, this was the common way that Holy Communion was thought of. The Western Church used the Synoptics wording (“body”), rather than the Gospel of John’s (“flesh”), and so the phrase “Take and eat, this is My Body” was used in the worship liturgies and became the most familiar to the people . . . even to us today.

Holy Communion is pictured as eating the **Bread of Life**! Into your mouth you receive the **Bread of Life**, the Lord Jesus Christ³! Jesus emphasizes this **SEVEN TIMES IN SEVEN VERSES** in John chapter 6! Here are a few of those verses:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. John 6:53

[Jesus said], For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. John 6:55

As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats of Me, he also will live because of Me. John 6:57

The Lord's Supper is called Holy "**Communion**"... the word "**Communion**" means a sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ. In John 6, this Holy "**Communion**" is pictured as eating the "**Bread of Life**"⁴.

In the **Synoptic Gospels**, we take Holy Communion for the "**forgiveness of sins**." Holy Communion assures us that our sins are removed from us and that God will never ever remember our sins again.

In the Gospel of John, the emphasis is that Holy Communion gives us **eternal life**, and guarantees the **resurrection of the dead** on the Last Day.

[Jesus said] Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. John 6:53

Holy Communion is where Jesus gives Himself to you; where He feeds you the **Bread of Life**! Jesus gives you life: eternal life and resurrection life! He does this when you first, **believe in Him** (*spiritual eating*); and He gives you the **Bread of Life** when you **eat His flesh** and **drink His blood** in Holy Communion (*sacramental eating*)⁵!

³ As conservative Lutheran Christians, we confess it this way: The other eating of Christ's body is oral or sacramental, when Christ's true, essential body and blood are orally received and partaken of in the Holy Supper by all who eat and drink the consecrated bread and wine in the Supper. This is done by the believing as a certain pledge and assurance that their sins are surely forgiven them and that Christ dwells in them and is at work in them. This supper is received by the unbelieving for their judgment and condemnation. The words of the institution by Christ clearly declare this. At the table and during the Supper He offers His disciples natural bread and natural wine, which He calls His true body and true blood. At the same time He says, "Eat" and "Drink."
Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, FCSD VII.63-64

⁴ In a similar way, the Gospel of John used another word picture to teach us about the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. In John chapter 4, Holy Baptism is Living Water, and in John 3 it is being Born Again with water and the Spirit. The Gospel of John is written differently than the Synoptic Gospels, and John uses these word pictures to teach us the truths of the Kingdom of God.

⁵ This is a hard teaching! Be sure not to dismiss it, minimize it, or spiritualize it. Note John 6:60. The people of Capernaum rejected Jesus' teaching and "turned back and no longer walked with Him" (ironically, that is John 6:66!) Don't let that happen to you! Holy Communion is a serious doctrine that requires full faith in the

In addition we learn in the Gospel of John, that Jesus promises to “*abide in us and we in Him*” when you eat the *Bread of Life* in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Whoever eats of My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me, and I in him. John 6:56

The word *abide* means that God makes His home in you. This is the doctrine of the **Mystical Union**⁶. Christ lives within you, strengthening your faith, and empowering you for holy living. The resurrected and ascended Savior makes His home in you: it's the result of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Savior --> the *Bread of Life* --> in Holy Communion!

Today we will take Holy Communion for those who know, understand, and believe the Savior's words. When you come up today, think of this as the *Bread of Life*, that God gives you from heaven. This is the flesh and blood of the Son of God in bread and wine. This is *New Testament Manna* from heaven, that gives you eternal life!

If you **do not believe** Christ's *flesh and blood* is present in Holy Communion, then do not come up and take the Lord Supper! That is exactly what the warning of 1 Corinthians 11 is all about! You must recognize the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament otherwise you are misusing it and bringing judgment on yourself.

Jesus is the *Bread of Life*! *Whoever comes to Him shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Him shall never thirst!*

Jesus has come down from heaven, like *Manna* from God, to give life to the world! His life, death, and resurrection was His work that brings life to the world. You eat the *Bread of Life* in two ways:

- ⇒ When you *trust in Him* and His promises of eternal salvation (*spiritual eating*)!
- ⇒ And when you *eat His flesh and drink His blood* in the bread and wine of Holy Communion (*Sacramental*)!

Amen!

Savior's words. Otherwise, as Saint Paul says, you are unworthy to eat at the Lord's table and you bring judgment on yourself (1 Cor 11:27ff).

⁶ The presence of [the Holy Trinity] in the believers assures them of the fullness of both His grace and power in them, grace and mercy for their sins, and power for their sanctification. [John](#), P. E. Kretzmann, online commentary, slightly edited

Lord Jesus you are the Bread of Life who gave your flesh and blood for the life of the world. Send us the Holy Spirit, so that we may rightly believe in You and Your promises; and to worthily receive your flesh and blood in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. We thank you for coming down from heaven to give us eternal life!

Exodus 16:1-15

1 They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. 2 And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, 3 and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?" 8 And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him--what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD." 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" 10 And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 And the LORD said to Moses, 12 "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13 In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. 14 And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

John 6:1-13, 47-58

1 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. 3 Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 5 Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. 7 Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." 13 So they gathered them up and

filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

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." 52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."