

“A Word for the Life of the World”

Text: John 6:51, 66-69

Years ago, former President Herbert Hoover said this of teachers: “Speaking, not as a religious man, not even as a Christian—the greatest teacher who ever lived was Jesus. His teaching was brilliant, beautiful, and persuasive. He also taught anyone, anywhere, by the roadside, on the mount, on the sands of the Sea of Galilee. His students didn’t have to have credentials or grades, they just had to have interest enough to stand and listen.

His teaching has come down to us, over centuries, as no other teaching has. Not too long ago the New York Times listed the Sermon on the Mount as the most important event in all of history. He had something wonderful to say and he said it wonderfully and it still has great meaning today.

You and I might disagree with some of what Herbert Hoover said, but the emphasis of the word of Jesus is not something we would question. While the most important work of Jesus is clearly our salvation through his death and resurrection and his primary role is that of our Savior, yet his word is of primary importance to us and to the world. In our text he speaks of his mission and some of his disciples, not the twelve, find the message offensive and no longer follow Jesus. Regardless, Jesus tells us what he is doing and what he expects from those who follow him. It is the most important message of all for it is-

A WORD FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

I. It is found only in Jesus Christ

II. It is certain because of what He has done

I.

A. Catherine the Great ruled Russia two hundred years ago. She imagined grand new cities that she would build. Once when Austrian Emperor Joseph II was visiting, she asked him to participate in laying two corner stones for a grand metropolis that she had envisioned. Joseph II was not optimistic about the plan. He said, “She laid the first stone, and I laid the last.” He was correct. The city she envisioned was never built; in fact we don’t even know its proposed site today. In contrast it is comforting to read: “For he (Abraham) was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” (Hebrews 11:10)

As we have heard over the last several weeks, Jesus calls himself the “Bread of Life”. The Manna in the Old Testament and the feeding of the 5,000 in the New Testament has a deeper meaning than the obvious events of feeding the multitudes in both circumstances. There was complaining and doubting in both cases, and as Jesus speaks it is no different.

Jesus makes an extraordinary promise in verse 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.” What Jesus is calling for is faith in those who follow him.

Some of those who claimed to do this found what Jesus said as offensive. They said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” We face that today as well. We live in a world that sees all religions as the same. At times it seems as though the Christian Church is on the outside looking in. We are told that many roads lead to heaven. The other day I was watching a documentary on Sodom and Gomorrah. One of the Christian commentators said that it was unfortunate that in Judaism and Christianity the practice of homosexuality is a sin. He went on to say that in this case the Bible is really talking about sexual sins in general and that the Bible doesn’t condemn homosexuality

at all. Amazing isn't it? Jesus words continually are rejected as he points out who he is and what he accomplished for us.

B. In verse 53 Jesus says: “Truly, truly I say to you, unless eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” Jesus calls for faithfulness in his disciples of all ages. This becomes an issue later on this text when many who followed previously departed from him because they were offended by his message.

After that occurrence Jesus asked the question: “Do you want to go away as well?” There were many disciples of Jesus. Some of those who were outside of the twelve no longer followed Jesus. Now, as he often does, Peter speaks for the twelve: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

This is the basis of our belief and teaching. This is what we believe, teach, and confess as our Lutheran forefathers wrote in our confessions. What we have believed historically, we believe for today and tomorrow. This is the message that is preached in this pulpit and what is taught in our classrooms of Trinity Lutheran School and Lutheran High.

II.

A. The message Jesus was bringing and we bring today is the Gospel. This is God's plan of salvation for the world. Because it is God's way, it is not about what we do. It is not about having things our way. Because of this, it can be unappealing and unexciting. Our human nature does not like to hear what Jesus says in verse 63: “The flesh is of no avail.”

When we consider the triumph and glory of Jesus and our life in heaven, then that is an entirely different matter to us. This is the life that Jesus is talking about that he brings to the world and for the world. Later on Jesus says: “I came that they may have life and have it

abundantly.” (John 10:10) As Jesus calls for belief from us there is underneath it all the promise of the resurrection. Several times in this longer section, Jesus promises that we will be raised on the last day. Believing in Jesus means life forever. In verse 57 Jesus says: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.”

B. Coming to Jesus and receiving this message of life is never a human decision. Jesus emphasizes that when he says: “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” Through the working of the Holy Spirit, God draws people to himself. We believe that he does this through the Means of Grace, which are the word and the sacraments.

Martin Luther writes in the Third Article of the Apostles Creed: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

As it was in the day of Jesus, so it continues today as well. There are many who reject the message of the Gospel. It may seem foreign to them or too restrictive. They may not like what it calls for from them and that they have no part in obtaining their salvation. They may not like it because they want to live in the way that is most comfortable to them. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)

We know the message of life that Jesus brings. We have been drawn to it, but it is not a message to keep for ourselves. Jesus says in our very first verse: “And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” That is Jesus mission and it is a word we are privileged to bring. Amen.