

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
15 August 2021

John 6:51-58

Many of you know that I enjoy watching television when I have the time. Television offers us a window into the culture of the day and allows us to see what has become important to American culture, what has fallen into disrepair, the kinds of things young people are interested in, and the types of issues that cause us anxiety. Television shows us how Americans view issues of faith and religion and gives us a slice of American life in just a few minutes.

One of the things that I have noticed lately by watching TV is the ever-growing number of television shows that have to do with food. Food preparation and serving has become a fascinating subject for television audiences. You always knew that PBS had great food shows, like *American Test Kitchen*, and introduced folks like Julia Childs and others to the nation. What I didn't know until recently is that PBS broadcasts over 200 food and cooking related shows nationally every week. And many of the mainline networks are following suit. Not only do we have The Food Network and the Cooking Channel, but it seems like all networks have gotten into the food-entertainment business. Think of the great cooking shows that have become iconic over the last few years. Do you remember "The Chew," "Hell's Kitchen," "Chopped," "The Next Food Network Star," "Top Chef," and "the Rachael Rae show?" My favorite food show was produced by CNN of all people: "Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown," was a popular program from 2013-2018. Sadly, the production stopped when Bourdain committed suicide.

We are obsessed with the idea of food. Just think of terms commonly used today that we could not find just 20 or 30 years ago: Certified Organic, Farm-to-Table, Gluten-Free, Microbrewery, IPA, Small Batch, etc. Food has even become an adjective to describe folks with a particularly sophisticated palate. In my country we used to call those people, "Rich" or "Lucky," but here we call them "Foodies," and depending on where you are, that term can either be an insult or a great compliment. Food is everywhere and it seems as though everyone has just become obsessed with it.

Well, we are not alone. The people in Jesus' day were also fairly concerned about the issue of food. In fact, Jesus himself has been talking about bread for the last few Sundays. The entire chapter 6 of the Gospel of John is one long presentation about food. The chapter begins with the feeding of the five thousand after which Jesus leaves town, hoping to get a bit of rest in Capernaum, but when he arrives there, the crowds quickly follow. Jesus then begins a lengthy discussion about bread. He says to them, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (25.) He then begins a lengthy discussion about food that spoils and satisfies only for a short while, and food that endures to eternal life and produces that eternal life. There are two types of bread: the bread that comes from the

world, which feeds the world, but has the potential to spoil and which satisfies only momentarily. The second type of bread is the bread sent down from heaven by God. This bread gives life to the world, a life that starts here and continues after we are dead.

The followers who chased Jesus wanted the first type of bread, whereas Jesus wanted nothing more than to give them the second type of bread. The first bread is material possessions, comfort, the satisfaction of physical needs. Now, Jesus does not say that this bread is unimportant, or that folks should not work to secure it. In fact, remember that Jesus began this whole conversation with a miraculous meal. What Jesus says is that this bread is not all there is. In fact, this bread only satisfies momentarily. When you die you cannot take this bread with you. This bread, whether it is great food, great possessions, great homes, and cars... whatever this bread may look like, you cannot take it with you. You must leave this bread behind, either to spoil or to be used by others.

But there is another type of bread. The bread sent down by God for the life of the world. This bread is Jesus himself, given for us, sent to the cross for us, made sacramental food for us. Jesus speaks metaphorically about this bread, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Sadly, as we said last week, those who were listening took him quite literally. In their minds they transported themselves to the well-known regulations in the Law of Moses against eating certain types of flesh and drinking blood. In fact, the expression "Flesh Eater" is used in the Old Testament as a metaphor for hostile action or to speak about the devil. (Gn 9:4; Lv 3:17; Dt 12:23; Ac 15:20).

The metaphor of bread and food can be made a bit more general. In a way, what Jesus is telling us is quite simple: There are two worldviews, fueling two different lifestyles. The first worldview is one that simply says: "The one with most toys wins." This worldview divides humanity into winners and losers. The winners are those who are rich, who have an abundance of privilege and wealth, who have the choice foods and the finest of clothes, who have achieved great fame and status, who have power and command respect. These are the winners, and we all want to be like them, play in their league, join their parties, rob shoulders with them and their friends. This worldview tells us the purpose of life is found in the acquisition of endless amounts of shiny toys, endless amounts of education, endless amounts of self-exploration, endless amounts of making yourself the center of the universe. Jesus acknowledges that we need some of these goods and services for our survival, but he reminds us that this is not what's most important for our ultimate survival. Life and salvation are ultimately not about us, but about God and what he is willing to do for us.

The second worldview tells us: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all else will be given to you in due time." This second worldview tells us that life is all about relationships and doing the will of God. The only possession worth our life is the possession of God's Son. He who has the Son in his or her heart has a treasure that goes beyond anything we can ever quantify, measure, or catalogue. The Son of God is the food

that feeds the hungry soul and leads to hope and eternal life. This food is the food of eternity, a food that once received never dies, but rather it produces abundant life forever. This is the food that makes forgiveness possible, makes joy complete, makes life bearable, and makes relationships life-giving. This is the food that conquers all fears, eliminates all hopelessness, heals all wounds, vanquishes all anxiety, ends all bitterness, forgives all sins, exiles all guilt and shame, fuels our faith, gives us strength for the journey, and guides us safely home.

I believe my friends that what's killing our world is not what we are eating, although I believe Paula Dean is the most dangerous American that ever lived. What's killing us is not what we are eating, but what's eating us: Our anxiety, purposelessness, and selfish ambition. Today, the Son of God offers himself for us as food and drink, so that by eating and drinking we may obtain the life that never fades. Come and eat, come, and drink, the food we are about to serve is God's answer to the problem of evil, sin and death. Come and eat and your Lord and Savior will do the rest. Amen!