

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“The Bread of Life Abides”

John 6:51-69

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (John 6:56).

The past couple of weeks we’ve been looking at the Bread of Life discourse in John chapter 6 and focusing on the promises Jesus makes in this chapter. The first promise was, “The Bread of Life Satisfies” (Jn. 6:35). Every other hunger returns but Jesus, the Bread of Life satisfies in a lasting and permanent way. The second promise was “The Bread of Life Raises” (Jn. 6:40). Jesus died and rose not just for our souls, but for our bodies, our flesh and bones. “I will raise you up on the last day” He says. *This week we will focus on the theme, “The Bread of Life Abides.” “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”*

That God abides within us, is a promise that God’s Word makes many times and in various ways. In Galatians, Paul writes, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (2:20). In John 15, Jesus says “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (v. 5). And in John 14, Jesus promises that He and the Father will go to those who love Him and “make our home with them” (v. 23).

This promise to abide with us has far-reaching implications. **First, it means you are not alone.** That’s encouraging because there’s more than one pandemic we’re living through right now. In 2017 the United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy called loneliness “a public-health epidemic.” Researchers say loneliness is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic. A 2019 survey led by the health insurer Cigna found that 61 percent of Americans report feeling lonely. Two years ago, the United Kingdom even appointed a “minister for loneliness”. In spite of all the ways we can connect with others, keeping in touch and forming strong friendships seems harder than ever. Potential friends slip back into being friendly acquaintances. Said another way, it’s easy today to have lots of acquaintances, but it’s much harder to have people who really know you, and with whom you feel close.

Of course, COVID-19 hasn’t helped, what with the “social distancing,” “self-isolation,” and “shelter in place”. Curiously, researchers have found the most lonely group in the country are those 18-24 years of age. It seems kind of counter-intuitive because this group is very connected on social media. Though social media *can* bring people together around mutual interests, it can also amplify disagreements, and divide people down into ever smaller echo chambers.

Moreover, loneliness begets loneliness. If you are lonely, one of the last things you want to do is reach out. And when you’re not your best self, then building relationships can become even more difficult. People are typically embarrassed or ashamed about feeling lonely because they see it as a sign of inadequacy or deficiency. People are drinking more, but of course that doesn’t help. It too can create a negative cycle. A Chris Stapleton song says, “I drink because I’m lonely, and I’m lonely because I drink.”

Loneliness is not just a Covid thing. It effects children whose parents are too busy working, wives whose husbands are practically married to whatever sport happens to be in season, and social media butterflies who have countless “friends” but no one who really listens to them at the end of the day. [I am indebted to an article written by Jacob Sweet entitled “The Loneliness Pandemic”, Harvard Magazine, January-February 2021].

Jesus gave us a promise, *“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”* This does not nullify the need for social connection. But it does promise we are never truly alone. After the funeral, when the well-wishers and family members are all gone, Jesus remains and abides in you. When coworkers quietly start pushing you off into the margins, Jesus remains, and abides in you. When nothing is

working out for a family celebration at Thanksgiving or Christmas celebration, Jesus abides in you. He is Immanuel: God with Us, which also means God with you . . . always and forever.

The second implication of the promise of Jesus to abide in us is that **you are fully known**. Renown physician and pastoral counselor Paul Tournier describes a successful marriage as one in which husbands and wives are constantly seeking to understand one another. The reason is simple. We long to be known by someone. We long for someone to understand us.

Because Jesus abides in us, He knows us. Psalm 139, "O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar . . . You are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether." He knows us completely, thoroughly, perfectly, even down to the hairs of our head (Mt. 10:30). He knows our needs and anxieties, our hopes and dreams, and the sinful habits of our hearts. When someone knows you really well, that can be both good news and bad news right? There's no pulling the wool over God's eyes. But He is also our Savior. In John 10, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Jesus knows you, the good, the bad, the ugly . . . and still, He loves you. It means you are understood. When no one else can quite relate to what you're going through, how you're feeling . . . when no one else cares enough to try to understand you, the promise of Scripture is that Jesus knows you, understands you perfectly well, and loves you.

Finally, when Jesus says He abides in you, it means **you are not your own**. For freedom minded Americans, this may not sound like good news. But it is only a bad thing if the one who owns you is self-centered and self-serving. To be owned by a slave master or an abusive spouse or an autocratic government . . . that's bad. To be owned by an addiction is bad. But it is Jesus who has bought you, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, not to enslave you, but to free you, to unshackle you from sin, and death and the devil. So, to belong to Him is true freedom. One glance at the cross will tell you He wants what is best for you, even if it's at great personal cost. Clearly, His will for you is good. Clearly, He is trustworthy. So you can pray as Jesus prayed, "nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." There is nothing more freeing than to be owned by Him. There's nothing better than to be able to commend yourself into His hands in all the complexities of life, at work, at home, within the family.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says, "You are not your own for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). How can we glorify God with our bodies? In one way, you are already doing it, having your bodies here in church. When you make worship a priority over everything else, it strengthens the church, it strengthens the hymn singing and the fellowship of the saints and the work we can do together.

Simply coming up to receive the Lord's Supper glorifies God with your body, for Paul said "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

How else might you glorify God with your body? Look at your neighbors as Christ within you looks at them. Maybe they're lonely. Maybe they feel like no one cares enough to really know them. Lean in. Take time to get to know them, so that you can also take time to serve them.

You can glorify God with your body in our community too, taking your body to volunteer with Meals on Wheels or at the hospital or the Humane Society. It might include working a few less hours to spend time with your kids. It might mean turning off the baseball game to spend time with your wife. It might mean reaching out to an online friend and taking them out for a cup of coffee.

You are not your own, because Jesus abides in you. Let Jesus call the shots for a change. Let Him use you, your skills and experiences, your hands and your voice. Let Him use you to serve others, and in serving others you will find that you are fully alive, living the abundant life God wills for you.

The promises of Jesus change us. They enliven us for right living in this world. In this promise to abide in us, He promises 1) you are never alone; 2) you are fully known; and 3) you are not your own. Thanks be to God. Amen.