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Pentecost 13

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Eating is Not Just About Eating!”

Text: John 6:51-58; Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eating is not just about eating. If it were, then a dinner at your house would be the same as a dinner at McDonalds would be the same as a dinner out at a fine restaurant. But clearly, those three things are very different, even if the food served at all three places were very much the same.

Eating is not just about eating. Just ask a young lady when she is asked out to dinner by a young man. The choice of restaurant makes a big difference and a big impression.

Eating is not just about eating. Business people use meals to negotiate and close deals. Couples use meals at wedding receptions to celebrate an important day. Inviting someone over to your house to eat means more than just eating together, but conversation and sharing. Company dinners are used for more than simply giving your employees a nice meal.

Eating is not just about eating. Wives (or husbands!) that go to the trouble to cook a special meal do so as a sign of love. Families eating together talk about the day. Pot luck dinners at churches reveal and create an atmosphere of closeness and hospitality.

Eating is not just about eating. It is much more than that.

And so when we heard this evening the invitation from the book of Proverbs, the invitation of Wisdom to come and eat at the feast that has been prepared, it is about much more than simply eating. And when we heard the invitation of Jesus in the Holy Gospel to eat His flesh and drink His blood, it is about much more than simply eating. These are invitations to us to share in the things of God. And the **two** meals that we are invited to in these **two** readings are *really one and the same*.

And so first from Proverbs, we heard that “Wisdom” has prepared a great feast. In fact so great is this feast that a special house has been built for it, with seven pillars – seven being the Biblical number of completeness. So great is this feast that beasts have been

slaughtered for it and so meat will be served – a dish reserved only for very special and great occasions. And so great and expensive is this feast that we would expect only a select, chosen few to be invited to take part. But in that we are surprised. Wisdom invites not the best and the brightest, not the rich and the powerful, not the ones who think themselves already wise and complete. No, invited are all who are “*simple*,” all who “*lack sense*,” to come in and eat and drink. **Because eating is not just about eating.** More will be given than just food and drink. Those who enter will be satisfied in both body and soul. They will receive not only Wisdom’s food and drink, but also Wisdom itself. For the goal of this feast, this meal, is that those who come would “*leave their simple ways and live, and walk in the way of insight.*”

And so too in the invitation of Jesus in the Holy Gospel. For as Jesus continues His discourse on the heavenly food that He has come to bring to all, that He is “*the bread of life*,” He also speaks of what more will be given than just food and drink. **Because eating is not just about eating.** Those who eat will be satisfied in both body and soul. They will receive not only Jesus’ food and drink, but in fact, Jesus Himself. His very flesh and blood as food and drink. For the result of this feast, this meal, is that whoever eats and drinks “*abides in Me, and I in him.*”

And to this feast, you have been invited!

For as I said before, these two readings describe not two different feasts, but one and the same feast. For the person spoken of as “Wisdom” in the reading from Proverbs is really the Son of God Himself. The Son of God *before* He became incarnate as the man Jesus Christ. The fact that wisdom is called “she” in these verses is simply a quirk of Hebrew grammar – the same idea as calling ships “she” in English. But the context of these verses, in all of Proverbs chapters 8 and 9 make it clear that this invitation from Wisdom is really an invitation from God Himself, the Son of God, inviting us to His banquet, to eat and to drink, and in eating and drinking to share in the things of God.

And when the Son of God “*came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man*,” He continued to offer *this same invitation*. For Jesus ate and drank with many. He ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, with prostitutes, with cheaters and thieves, with lepers, with outcasts. He invited the poor, the lame, the blind and deaf, the “simple” and those “lacking sense” to come and be with Him. To eat and drink with Him, but in eating and drinking to receive much more than food and drink – to hear and receive His teaching, His Word, His wisdom, and in hearing and receiving to receive the gift of faith. **Because eating is not just about eating**, especially when you eat with God Himself!

And so too with the words of Jesus that we heard from John chapter 6. The banquet that

Jesus spoke of in Proverbs, and the banquet that He pointed to during His life on earth as He ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, is now the banquet He describes in great detail to the crowds who gathered around Him along the Sea of Galilee, looking for food. He had fed over 5,000 people with the five loaves of bread and two fish, and when they came to Him looking for more, He tells them: **eating is not just about eating**. They are looking for one kind of banquet, but Jesus invited them instead to His banquet, to His feast! The feast of faith. The feast of wisdom. The feast of life. The feast where He gives not just food, but where He gives Himself, His very flesh and blood, that those who eat and drink do so not only physically, but also spiritually. To receive all the gifts of God and be united with God. For as He says, ***“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 also will live because of Me.”***

And you simply cannot hear those words without thinking of the feast which our Lord sets before us here each and every Sunday. . . . Now, did the disciples understand that the first time they heard these words of Jesus? Undoubtedly not! They were just as confused as those who left Jesus because of these words, thinking them too hard to accept, or too offensive, or too controversial. For as the Jews disputed, ***“How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”*** . . . But when the disciples were gathered in the Upper Room, and Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying, ***“Take and eat, this is My body,”*** these banquet words of Jesus suddenly made sense. Here was His feast of body and blood. Here was His feast of wisdom and life. Here was His feast of forgiveness and the sharing of all the things of God. **Here eating is not just about eating!** It is about abiding in Christ, and Christ in us.

And to this feast, you have been invited!

You have been invited – not just to eat and drink, but to receive and abide in Christ and He in you. To hear His Word and His wisdom. To learn who you are and who God is. To receive the gift of faith. To confess your sins and receive forgiveness. To humble yourself, admit that spiritually we are but simple and lacking sense, and to receive His care. And in coming to us and feeding us with His body and blood, your Saviour lives in you and you in Him. He takes all that is yours – your sin, your weakness, your lowliness, and your death . . . and gives you all that is His – His perfection, His strength, His kingdom, and His life. Because when you come to this House, God’s House, and when you come to this Table, God’s Table, and when you feed on this food and drink, God’s food and drink, **eating is not just about eating**. This is all much more than a meal. This is you, participating already now, in the life of Heaven, which has no end.

Now some, unfortunately, do not want to come to this feast of Word and Meal. For some, this talk of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus is just too much. For others,

admitting that we are sinful, that we are the simple ones and the ones lacking sense, is just too much. And still others are too busy to stop and eat – instead, eating spiritually the way many eat physically. On the run, in their cars, fast food, frozen food, or no food at all. And as the physical health of many is suffering these days because of it, so also the spiritual health of many. Either becoming obese on the spiritual junk food of this world, or starving to spiritual death. And it is a danger that even you and I in the church are not immune to.

And so the warning that we heard in the Epistle from Ephesians: ***“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of time, because the days are evil.”*** For there are many “banquets” in this world calling out to you. Banquets to feast upon the things of this world, and the wisdom of this world, and many are going into those banquets and filling their bodies and souls not with the good things of God, but with the sinful and deceptive things and ideas of this world. . . . And so, Paul says, look carefully how you walk, and where you walk. Consider carefully where you are feasting, what you are filling your mind with, and what wisdom you are swallowing. Be wise, because the days are evil. . . . There are many feasts, many banquets calling out to you and inviting you in, but all lead to death. There is only one that leads to life. There is only one where the death and resurrection of Jesus is on the menu. There is only one that can give you spiritual health and strength, wisdom and insight, faith and trust, forgiveness and life.

And how great is this feast? Some time ago I was working with a couple whose lives were just crumbling and falling apart. They were scared, and their future was uncertain. The world and its wisdom had let them down. Sin was devouring them. And as we were together, searching for hope, searching for assurance, the wife looked up at me from across the table and, with her eyes full of tears, asked, *“Can I have communion . . . now!?”*

Jesus said, ***“I am the bread of life.”*** Indeed, He is.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.