

May 25, 2025

The Gospel of John
XXI. Feasting on Jesus
John 6:41-59

Dr. William P. Seel
Easley Presbyterian Church
Easley, South Carolina

Don Everts tells of a Christmas morning several years ago, when he found himself sprinting through snow on an icy road leading to a prison in Ontario, Oregon – all because he had let down his guard a few days earlier and actually taken seriously something Jesus had said: “*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*”¹ His brother was in that prison in Oregon, and as Everts read Jesus’ words he couldn’t stop himself from thinking that if he were in prison on Christmas, he would want someone to come visit him. “*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*” So he went. He took Jesus’ advice, and he went.

He didn’t have a car back then, so he had to take a Greyhound bus on Christmas Eve from Tacoma, Washington to Ontario, Oregon, home of the Snake River Correctional Institute. It was already dark when the bus dropped him off in what passed for downtown Ontario. It was also windy and bitterly cold. He trudged through the snow and wind and ice until he reached a cheap motel at the edge of town, out by the interstate. In the morning, Christmas morning, he put on every piece of clothing he had with him and set out for the prison, which was six miles away. It was as he was walking these six bitterly cold miles, he says, that he first began to doubt the wisdom of Jesus’ teaching:

“Do unto others” . . . Yeah, it sounded nice. Nice material for bathroom plaques and refrigerator magnets. But it had led me to one of the most painful, awkward times of my life. As I trudged along the interstate, trying to walk the narrow line between getting run over by speeding semis on the left and falling down the embankment on my right, I began daydreaming about that motel room. That warm, comfy motel room. Had cable, you know. But here I was: cold, tired, walking along an interstate in the dead dark of morning . . .

“Do unto others” . . . what an upside-down, ludicrous piece of advice, Jesus.²

Then he saw the prison in the distance, checked his watch, and began to worry that he wasn’t going to make it in time for visiting hours. And suddenly, he said, a longing rose up in his heart such as he had never felt before – and he began to run. Slowly and self-consciously, at first; but then an all-out, self-forgetting sprint. Thinking of his brother, thinking of what Jesus had said. And that’s when it happened, he said. All of a sudden he began to feel more alive and more joyful

than he had ever felt in his life. All because of Jesus, and what Jesus had told him to do. Jesus, he thought to himself, Jesus had been right all along:

“Do unto others” . . . My own common sense never would have gotten me out of that motel room. Well, let’s be honest: I never would have left town on a Greyhound on Christmas Eve to begin with! But Jesus’ upside-down, ludicrous teaching . . . turned out to be right . . . It wasn’t a clever idea, it was a seed of reality that was only waiting for my heart to be good soil so that it could grow and grow and grow . . .³

It was his best Christmas ever. He surprised his brother; and it was a wonderful, heart-stuck-in-your-throat kind of day the whole day through. Everts concludes with this thought:

*Jesus was not a good teacher. Never be confused about that. He didn’t teach nice little aphorisms. He didn’t come with clever observations and apt suggestions. No. Jesus was **brilliant**. He knew – with utter precision – what leads to life and what doesn’t . . . And so he sets us straight once and for all: Do these crazy things and you will have life.⁴*

* * * * *

I tell you that story because that story is precisely what our passage this morning is all about: do these crazy things and your will have Life. Listen to Jesus, come to Jesus, do what Jesus tells you to do – because He **is** our Life. Everts’ story is a living illustration of pretty much everything Jesus has to say to us in our passage. Don’t believe me? Well then, let’s look more closely at our passage together.

Remember that just before our passage begins, two big things have just happened. One is that Jesus has fed a crowd of five thousand with only five loaves of bread and two fish. This then leads to a debate with the religious leaders about how, during the time of Moses, God had sent manna from heaven to feed His people during their wilderness wandering.⁵ Jesus – remember, having just fed five thousand with just about nothing – tells the religious leaders that He is the new and true and lasting manna from heaven. That He is, in fact, the Bread of Eternal Life – chapter six, verse thirty-five: *“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”* And then He tells the religious leaders that He has come down from heaven to be this Bread of Life for them and for all people – come down from heaven to do the will of His Father in heaven, which is to bring eternal life to all.

Our passage then begins with the religious leaders responding to these statements Jesus has made about being the Bread of Life and the true and lasting manna. Actually, they can’t really argue with Jesus on the Bread of Life and manna business – He did just feed five thousand with only five loaves of bread, a miracle of multiplication which they had witnessed with their own eyes and which also far exceeded anything Moses had ever done. So, instead, they go after the *“I have come down from heaven”* statement – Jesus’ claim to be the Son of the Father in Heaven, sent

by the Father to earth. They grumble to themselves that this claim is ridiculous – that He came down from heaven. *“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”*

Jesus responds to their grumbling with a statement which really sets their teeth on edge. He tells them that it is okay if they don’t understand or believe what He is telling them – that only those whom the Father draws to Himself can come to understand and believe in Him. In other words, He is telling them that they clearly don’t know God as well as they claim – for if they truly knew God, then they would have no trouble seeing that Jesus is His Son sent down from heaven. No trouble seeing and believing that Jesus, verse fifty-one, is *“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.”*

Well, that is really too much for the religious leaders – for they hear these words about the bread being His flesh as an invitation to cannibalism: *“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”* And to make matters worse, instead of backing down a bit from that image of people eating His flesh – say by telling them that, of course, He means this only symbolically – instead of backing down, Jesus doubles down on that disturbing image. Verses fifty-three and fifty-four:

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. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”

And then, what I believe to be the key verse in understanding the whole of what Jesus has said here to the religious leaders, verse fifty-six: *“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”*

“Abides in me, and I in him.” That’s what I think this passage is all about. Eating His flesh, drinking His blood is not an invitation to cannibalism. Rather it is a deliberately shocking statement of what God wants from us, of what God wants with us, of what God has sent Jesus to do. It is an eye-opening, attention grabbing statement of what the eternal life, the abundant life Jesus has been speaking of is all about. It is a startling picture of just exactly what has set the whole of the Biblical story into motion – a picture of the longing of God for His people, of the depth and breadth of the love of God for His people.

For what it tells us that God’s goal, God’s desire, God’s plan, God’s will, God’s joy is simply this: that we should come to know such an intimacy, such a close and committed relationship between ourselves and God, that it would be just as if He is in us, and we in Him. Eating His flesh, drinking His blood is just a provoking, invoking picture of God’s great desire to be in close communion with you and me and with all His children – once again as in the Garden of Eden, but now forevermore.

Because when that happens, when Christ is in us and we are in Christ, not only will God have the joy of close communion with us, but we will at last enjoy that eternal life, that abundant

life, that Bread of Life life that we can only receive from God. Which is, as Jesus Himself points out, not something we get from Him so much as it is a quality of daily living that we begin to discover and enjoy when we are near to Him. The Bread of Life is not something we get from Jesus, like a loaf of multi-grain from the grocery store – rather the Bread of Life **is** Jesus. And so the more Jesus is in us, and the more our lives are intertwined with His, then the more and more our lives become what we have always wished and prayed that they should become: deep, meaningful, contented, abounding in love, abounding in peace, abound in goodness, abounding in joy. *“As the living Father has sent me,”* Jesus says, *“and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.”* Life! Abundant and eternal Life!

So how then does this happen? If this intimacy of He in us and we in Him is what God most desires and the reason why He has sent us His Son in the first place; and if this intimacy of He in us and we in Him is the one and only key to the life we most deeply desire – then how does this happen? How do we get there from here? How do we get more and more of Jesus in us, and we in Him?

Well, remember what Jesus tells the religious leaders – that this is not something we human beings ever accomplish on our own. That the only way this can happen is if the Father draws us to Himself – *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”* (v. 44). But how does this happen? Well, I think our passage as a whole is the answer to that question: Jesus provokes us into drawing near. The entire passage consists in one provocation after another from Jesus to the religious leaders. *“I have come down from heaven”* – and they are provoked: *“Isn’t this Mary and Joseph’s kid?”* *“Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me”* – and they are provoked that Jesus should be calling into question the depth of their faith in God. *“And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh”* – and they are provoked: *“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”*

Do you see it? Jesus just keeps poking at them again and again, provoking them with one teaching after another. Such that the religious leaders, no matter what they may have already concluded about Jesus, find that they just can’t stop wrestling with Him, just can’t stop thinking about Him, just can’t stop arguing with Him. He is in their heads, provoking their thoughts and arguments and counter-arguments. Whatever else they think about Him, it is clear that He has provoked them into being able to think about nothing other than Him. He has captured their attention. And so He has drawn them to Himself.

And that is how God does it – how He draws us to Himself so that He should have the intimacy of He in us and we in Him, and so also that we should have the abundant and eternal life that is found only when we are in Him and He is in us. He draws us to Himself by provoking us – or would it be better to say by invoking our attention – causing us to think about Him, to wrestle with Him, to come into His nearer presence even if it is only to argue with Him or protest against Him. He provokes our consideration, He invokes our attention, He draws us into His orbit by leading us to stew over something we read in the Bible. Or by the earworm of a hymn that we just can’t get out of our minds. He provokes us, invokes us, through a conversation with a friend that somehow awakens spiritual thoughts and considerations; or through something which happens to us in the course of our day, which focuses our attention and leads us wondering to Him; or through something we hear or taste or see which convicts us of the goodness of His Creation.

Jesus Christ is everywhere and always poking at us, trying to get our attention, trying to get us to think more on Him and about Him, trying to get us drawn into conversation with Him (prayer!). Every day and in all sorts of ways He is provoking us, just as He provoked those religious leaders – seeking to get our attention in a hundred and one ways in the course of our day. And if we will just have ears to hear Him, eyes to see Him moving in our midst, good sense enough to know when it is that we are suddenly standing on holy ground and so should take off our shoes and bow down before Him⁶.

And so back to Don Everts' story. God provoked him with that single word of Scripture: "*Do unto others as you would have them do to you.*"⁷ Everts couldn't get that word out of his head – it provoked him. And no doubt the Holy Spirit was working also, to help him connect that word to the lonely plight of his brother in prison on Christmas. Jesus Christ got into his head, and he ended up in Jesus – until finally he had the good sense to give in and go. And then remember what he describes experiencing as he was doing so? As he ran to the prison, trying to get there in time, that feeling of being alive, of being deeply alive, wonderfully alive, joyfully alive like he had never known before. Following the word of Jesus, being provoked and drawn in by Jesus, being made willing to step out just once in accordance with Jesus' crazy instruction – and suddenly there it was, capital letter "L" Life, even if only for a moment. The Life that will only increase in us the more we allow Him into us, and the more we allow ourselves to abide in Him daily. That very Life which shall then be ours forever.

A little latter on in the same book where Everts tells that story about Jesus provoking him into that Christmas prison visit, he also writes this – something of a conclusion to both his book and to this sermon. Listen:

*Oh, for a church that would think on Jesus. Stare at him. Be amazed by his life. Oh, that we would all major in Jesus and nothing else. That we would find our jaws gaping at Jesus and that when we look at each other, the first thing we would notice would be each other's gaping jaws . . .*⁸

Oh, that we would be more open to the mystery of God's presence, that we would contemplate the divine that is at hand in Jesus. Oh, may we find ourselves, like so many people in Jesus' own day, taken by the divine in his presence. Overwhelmed by the scent of [God].

Oh, for a day when we open our eyes wide enough to see God in Jesus.

*Oh, for a time when seeing Jesus makes our inhibitions fade away and we find ourselves joyfully singing with the choir of all creation . . . longing to yell out the truth about God. About how cool he is. About our love for him.*⁹

And, even more, about His boundless love for us. Brothers and sisters, let us feast on Jesus!

¹ Matthew 7:12.

² Don Everts, God in the Flesh (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 77.

³ Everts, pp. 78-80.

⁴ Everts, p. 81.

⁵ Exodus 16.

⁶ Exodus 3:1-6.

⁷ Matthew 7:12.

⁸ Everts, p. 54.

⁹ Everts, pp. 65-66.