

Throughout John, Jesus uses various illustrations to tell us who He is and what He does. He says that He is the true vine, the door of the sheepfold, the Good Shepherd. Here in John 6, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

This idea of bread and hunger is excellent not only in how easy it is to understand – everyone needs food – but also in illustrating our dependence on Jesus for life.

Nobody can will himself to stay alive, or sustain his physical life through only himself. To go on living, we all need to eat. We depend on something from outside ourselves – bread, or other food – in order to stay alive.

And this is true for every point in life, from the baby in the womb being nourished by his mother through the umbilical cord to the toddler eating goldfish crackers, to the college student’s diet of ramen and pizza, to whatever else you might eat.

Whatever it is, though, you have to continue eating. Otherwise, you die.

So it is with our need for Jesus. As God, begotten of the Father, Jesus has life in Himself. He is the eternal Son of God, existing forever, not depending on anything to continue existing.

As John tells us in the well-known beginning of his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word.” ‘Was’ – past tense. At the start of time itself, the Son was already there.

John also tells us, two verses later, that “all things were made through Him.” Jesus is life, and Jesus creates and sustains life.

He formed you in your mother’s womb, and He still preserves you, both body and soul, even this very moment. Jesus knows what you need physically, and so He gives you food and drink, clothing and shelter, money to pay for it all, family and friends for your well-being – all of it from Him.

All of it provided so that you have what you can’t get by yourself.

Even greater than your physical dependence on Jesus is your spiritual dependence on Jesus.

Before He saves you, you are spiritually dead in your trespasses and sins. From your very conception, you and every other human being have been corrupted by sin, and this reality manifests itself in all the problems we see in the world, all the failings in our relationships, all the pain and illness in our bodies.

Our inability to do as God commands leads ultimately to death, both physical and spiritual.

And so just as Jesus gives you earthly bread to keep you from physical death, so too He Himself came down from heaven to be the Bread of Life for you and for all people.

The eternal Word of God, who Himself is God, was born as a baby of the Virgin Mary, lived in perfect obedience to His Father’s will, and then poured out His life on the cross.

As He said in the Gospel, “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” His flesh, His human body, hanging on the cross, is the gift of God to all humanity, the source of life for all those who cannot save themselves.

This inability to save ourselves is made clear in Jesus' words in our reading.

He says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." No one, not one person, is able to come to God of their own choice or free will. Only the Father does this.

Remember, Jesus said that He came not to do His own will but the will of the One who sent Him. If this is the case for the will of the Son of God, how can we say that a fallen, corrupt human will could act in such a way? You'd have to claim that your will is greater than that of Christ.

Furthermore, Jesus says, "All that the Father gives to me will come to me." You know what's even more passive than being the person receiving a gift? Being the gift itself!

You are given to the Son by the Father; it's out of your hands!

Contrary to what your sinful nature will tell you – because it desires to be control – this passiveness is a good thing!

You don't have to worry about if you've done enough, or if you've made a sincere enough decision, or if you've loved God enough.

God loves you. God chose you. God gave you to His Son. How wonderful is that? You may not be God's gift to mankind, but you are God's gift to His Son!

And by being the treasured possession of the Son of God, are you in perfect care. Jesus watches over you, protects you, provides for you.

Jesus gives you His word, read, preached, and taught, that your faith may be strengthened.

Jesus gives you His flesh in Holy Communion that you may have the life of God within yourself.

And finally, Jesus has promised that He will raise you from the grave at the Last Day and bring you into the fullness of eternal life in His kingdom. In Jesus, your salvation is complete!

Now, there must be a word of caution, or admonition, added to this.

Jesus says that all whom the Father gives to Him, through the preaching of the Word, through the waters of Holy Baptism, will come to Him. And so they will.

Jesus says that of those who are given to Him, He will never cast out any of them from His presence. And so He will not.

God is perfectly faithful, never breaking His promises or going back on His word. The bread of life will sustain to eternal life.

But, man can choose not to eat. You can neglect the hearing of the Word and the reception of the Sacrament. You do have the ability to starve your faith to death.

Just like how you don't choose to be born in this life but can choose to end this life, so too you don't choose to be born into the kingdom of God but you can choose to end that life. Through rejecting God gifts, you can commit spiritual suicide.

Aside from the clear necessity of your hearing of God's Word and receiving His Supper, two other big – and specific – applications come out of this.

First: when parents have their child baptized, they promise to God and to those present that they will nourish their child's spiritual life into maturity.

To neglect a child's spiritual life by failing to bring him to God's house and failing to teach him God's Word at home would be just like bringing a newborn infant home from the hospital, setting him in his crib, and then letting him starve to death by never feeding him.

Once the kid grows up, it's a different story, just like how you can't force your adult children to eat correctly. But, like you still love them and would tell them that a diet of Twinkies and beer isn't good for them, so too you can and should encourage them to hear God's Word and receive His Sacrament.

This reception of Word and Sacrament ties to the second big application.

When COVID hit, many governments throughout the world forbid God's people from gathering to hear His Word and receive His Supper.

And now more restrictions and lockdowns are rumored. May our Lord grant that it isn't the case, but whether or not it is, we must be resolute as God's people.

We are commanded by our Lord to gather, to hear His Word, to pray and sing to Him together, to receive His Supper. The Church exists by God's will and authority, not man's. And so man doesn't have the authority to keep Christians from receiving the Bread of Life.

If the government told you that you couldn't go out to get food, would listen to it, and watch your loved ones starve? Or would you act to get them food, even if it meant breaking such laws and orders?

If you'd break unjust laws, laws denying your God-given right to life, for the sake of physical bread, would you do the same so that you and your loved ones might receive the life-giving bread from heaven?

When this first happened, we were caught unawares, unprepared.

We thought if refraining from gathering for a couple weeks would flatten the curve, help hospitals, saves lives, well then, maybe it was worth it. Churches and Christians all over the world gave up the bread of life for weeks, then months, then over a year.

Peter's words at Pentecost, that "you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers," apply to us as well. But we must also heed Peter's call to repent, to turn back.

We must confess our sins, and confess that Jesus is the Bread of Heaven, the source of life itself, the Lord of all. We must resolve that whatever happens, we will follow Christ and obey His word, come what may.

By ourselves, we are totally unable to carry this out. No chance.

But just like the miraculous bread given to Elijah sustained him for forty days and nights, the Bread of Life can and will sustain you for whatever lies ahead.

That's why I say what I say when I dismiss you from the altar – though I didn't get to today: "May the true body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart in peace."

Amen.