

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace, from God our Father  
and from our Lord and Saviors Jesus Christ... Amen**

We're continuing in our series in the gospel of John and Jesus as the bread of life. Just a couple more notes about the gospel of John.

Christology is the academic word for the study of Jesus. The early Christian church had a lot of conflict over defining who Jesus was. The controversy pretty much divided along the lines of what is known as High Christology, essentially the idea that Jesus began as divine and then became human.

As opposed to Low Christology, the idea that Jesus began as Human and then became Divine. Do you see the difference? It's a matter of direction... And it caused all sorts of heresies...

I love the gospel of John, because it's a masterpiece in navigating this issue and presents a theologically mature form of understanding Jesus.

While the Gospel of John uses phrases that emphasize the divinity of Jesus, like, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." The gospel of John also emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, the real flesh and bone nature of Jesus, "and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

These kinds of phrases acknowledge both Jesus Divinity and Humanity; and both at the same time. This is known as classical Christianity. We hold that Jesus is fully Human; and fully Divine; and both at the same time.

It is important that Jesus is fully human, so we can identify with him... He knows what it's like to live in our skin; he really did suffer and die! It's equally important that Jesus is fully divine, He is the son of God, and so what we know about Jesus, we also know about God.

If one of these is overemphasized against the other, we end up with a broken Christianity. The gospel of John does a wonderful job of keeping these two natures of Jesus together.

This principle or formula has guided Christianity for more than seventeen hundred years, and it's articulated in our confessions. That's why we say the creeds; they remind us of the fundamentals and keep us on track...

Last week we talked about Jesus as the bread of life and suggested there were many ways that we experience Jesus as food that nourishes the soul. We mentioned his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his healing, his compassion... And last Sunday we specifically talked about how his teaching makes our lives meaningful.

Today I'd like to reflect on forgiveness. The question I would like to wrestle with, is how does Jesus' forgiveness feed our souls?

The phrase I'd like to focus on is that very phrase emphasizing Jesus Humanity, "The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Jesus died, and at our very human hands, and like the chief priest and the Pharisees and Sadducees, every time we point our fingers at others. Every time our hearts think violent thoughts about one another. We are in a very real way acting like those who had a role in crucifying Jesus.

And by giving his own flesh to our violent tendencies, he creates a mirror where we can see our own violence. This is all about opening our eyes, so we can confess our violence and receive his forgiveness. And this is fundamentally transformational...

In communion we receive the body and blood of Jesus, and we receive his forgiveness. And as Luther says, where ever there is forgiveness there is life.

For me, forgiveness is the process of staying in a relationship after it is broken. When an offense has been committed or perceived, reconciliation is the work of confession, forgiveness and remembering. Re-remembering – bringing members back together.

As we live and breathe, we offend others. Sometimes we intend to offend someone, and often times we don't. Sometimes we just say things we don't mean, we say things that are taken the wrong way, sometimes we do things without thinking, sometimes we might just be in the wrong place at the wrong time... It can happen accidentally...

Quick story... Way back in the early days of the internet and e-mail, I was a participant on what was called Sheep-L. It was an email listserv, you would send an email to this computer and it would copy and distribute your email to a whole group of people. These were the early days of the internet.

Sheep-L was a community, primarily a place where big sheep producers and researchers asked each other questions and batted ideas around. The shepherds were from all around the world; some from Australia, New Zealand, England, America, and initially the group was small.

When I joined, there were only a couple hundred participants, and most of them already knew each other as industry leaders from around the world. I felt like I was listening in on some big important conversations. But over a span of just a few years, the number of participants grew exponentially, and consequently the conversations changed.

Instead of researchers sharing their latest findings, people would share ridiculous information like what they had for breakfast or the names of their lambs. As the conversations became sillier, the big producers and researchers understandable moved on, they didn't participate anymore.

Not only did the content change, but people were also becoming angry and defensive about the most ridiculous things. One person would make a negative comment about a particular breed. Someone else would come to the rescue and defend the breed. Someone else would comment on the intelligence of the first person.

And suddenly, everyone would be all hot under the collar and calling everybody bad names. Just imagine, people from all around the world, sitting in the tranquility of their own living rooms foaming at the mouth calling each other names. These little fires seemed to flare up more often than not.

There was one guy from New York who always got under my skin. He always had the best of everything... He had the best sheep genetics, he had the best equipment, he was rich, he knew famous people, and he thought he knew everything there was to know about sheep. I know I wasn't the only one he irritated; he was always in the middle of some squabble.

One day, and I can't even remember what the issue was, but I was so tired of his constant quarrelling I started to write an email going on and on about how little self-awareness he had, how he should stop to think a few seconds before he harangued on other people, how he needed to get a life...

My email was not so nice and frankly it was very judgmental. I was so sure of my righteousness, my blood was boiling and it felt so good to indulge that hatred.

And suddenly at one point in the writing, I had a little epiphany and it hit me like a ton of bricks-- I was doing exactly the same thing that I was accusing him of doing.

When I realized that, I was a little humiliated, so I simply stopped writing the email. Unfortunately, I must have been distracted, because instead of deleting the email like I wanted, I accidentally hit the send button... And Holy Cow!

That guy in New York went ballistic! Talk about gnashing of teeth, he wrote a scathing response going on and on about what a horrible person it was who would write such a nasty email and not have the guts to sign it.

Oye... I was horrified, not only because I had written the email, but because I had made the mistake of sending it rather than deleting it. And not only that, if I took ownership of the email, I would be humiliated in the eyes of everyone in the community.

It was hard, but it was confession time... I found some courage and confessed to the whole group that I was the person who wrote the bad email. I explained I didn't sign it because I really intended to delete it and I explained about my own little epiphany about my own self-righteousness and asked for forgiveness.

And surprisingly, the guy in New York responded with the most gracious email I think I have ever received. He was not only forgiving; he praised my honesty and integrity, and lifted me up as an example of a decent and moral human being. I was floored; I was totally surprised. This guy, who I thought was so evil, was actually a person who was kind and gracious.

And you know what, in receiving his forgiveness, I felt free from all the hurt that I had caused. I felt free from all the bad judgments I had about him. We had reconciled with one another, and I saw him in a completely different way. As Luther said, where there is forgiveness, there is new life. I guess you could say there was a resurrection of sorts. Surprisingly, we became friends.

That whole experience was painful, offensive, completely startling and life giving, and all at the same time... Confession and forgiveness is like that. It's messy... It's excruciating to admit when we're wrong. And as we live in community with each other, we hurt one another, and we constantly need to reconcile with each other. It's always hard work and always a work in progress.

And the good news is that the bread of life that Jesus gives us is his flesh. His very human, his fully human body suffered and died at our hands, and through the resurrection, he completely forgives us our sins. He completely forgives you...

And because Jesus is the example of forgiveness, we can forgive one another. And forgiveness brings new life... it happens here every Sunday in our confession and forgiveness; it happens in our families as we tell the truth and forgive one another... It is one more way Jesus is the bread of life.

And we are reminded... Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen?