

The title for today's message is; **Food For The Soul, Take It, Or Leave It.**

Jesus said: ***The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"***

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

We have become, for the most part, very visual people. For example; Were always watching body language, facial expressions.

We watch movies to change our moods and stare at live-action news shots in order to stimulate our minds, and to absorb what's happening in our world.

We would rather see a movie, than to read a book, or watch, or hear the news on TV and radio, rather than picking up a news paper, or have a conversation with one another.

Everywhere you go, it seems that people are trying to take advantage, and make the most of, this visual society we live in today.

For example, many dentists' offices are now equipped with videos with cartoon figures explaining complicated oral surgery procedures.

Imagine, cartoon figures, and not just for the children either. It even makes an impression on adults.

And look at Department stores today. They have monitors playing an endless cycle of advertising videos throughout the store.

With the sole purpose of convincing the customer, you and I, what's on sale and what product is the best for us.

Sadly, the vast majority of our schools have become visual as well. Our classrooms are filled with televisions, and DVD players.

School buildings are topped off with satellite dishes, and much of the church Sunday school curriculum now includes videos.

Educators in public, private and religious schools, are now taking advantage of our visual world, and most for the good.

However, today it seems that the VCR, DVD and Cable In Class Networks are replacing the need for reading and lecturing.

And because we are visual people, it places additional pressure on those of us who stand in a pulpit, week after week proclaiming the word for God.

The fact is, more and more people today would rather see the message, than to hear it.

Now, with that in mind, I have some pictures I would like to share with you this morning.

However, I know that many of you would be somewhat upset if I brought in a big screen TV, and placed it here in the chancel.

So, instead, I invite you to use your imaginations. Now, picture a tall, slightly ragged-around-the-edges movie screen, standing here next to the pulpit.

Its one we've had around the church for years, and, well, I apologize for the slight tilt to the right, but the picture will be centered.

Now, there's three pictures I'm going to show you which will give you a visual interpretation of today's message.

Lets show the first slide. Here it is, can you see it? It's a loaf of bread.

Sorry, but the color on the slide is slightly faded, so I'm not sure whether its wheat, rye or white bread.

But I assure you, its a freshly baked loaf of bread, not sliced and placed in cellophane wrappers and tied with one of those little twists.

You know its true, "A picture is worth a thousand words," and this one picture is indeed worth that, or more, don't you think?

I say this because a loaf of bread is the most important visual of the message for today.

Having heard the Gospel text read, and now that you've seen this picture, do you see, and understand the message yet?

Well, just in case its not all that clear, allow me to say this. Even the people who were listening to Jesus at the time, had a hard time understanding it.

And to think Jesus was standing right in front of them. Apparently they too, were visual people, yet, they didn't have TV's, videos nor photos back then.

Instead, they were visual in a different way. They took everything at face value, they took everything they heard, or read, literally.

So you can imagine when Jesus announced to everyone there, that not only is He the Living Bread that came down from heaven.

But that: ***"This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*** This is why they had a problem understanding.

And the only thing they could say was: ***"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"***

Here Jesus was trying to paint a picture in their minds, and yet its clear, they were simply looking at the wrong picture.

So while your staring at the loaf of bread here on the screen, you may be asking, “How can this picture be the most important part of the message?”

After all, it’s just a picture of bread, in fact, its just like the bread you, and I have at home, right? Okay, let’s show the next picture.

You probably recognize this one as a Norman Rockwell painting. It’s his famous “Family Thanksgiving Dinner.”

Complete with all the trimmings and all the members of the family sitting around the table about to eat this wonderful meal.

It’s a picture that I believe many of us here today can identify with, you know, the warm memories of a family gathering and meal.

And when food is served at this family gathering, its special, almost sacred. It’s a time where we are together with those we love, and care about.

Remember, sharing food was an important covenant in the time of Jesus. To eat a meal with someone, was to do much more than just consume food.

It was to enter into a close, personal fellowship, with the host and with those who shared the table.

But sadly, Like Rockwell’s painting, the concept of eating with family and friends, has faded away from the landscape of our lives.

And instead of fixing this problem, we blame the fast food establishments, saying that they have removed much of our sharing a meal with each other.

We also blame our fast-paced lives, that it cuts into the time we have to sit down, and eat a meal together.

Instead, today we eat in order to swallow enough calories to give us the energy to make it until the next time we eat.

There's just not much in the way of a sacred covenant, or of fellowship in the way we nourish our bodies anymore.

Now, here's the last picture for today. Again, I apologize, this one is quite faded so you may have a problem seeing the details.

But, if you look closely, you can make out a figure of a Man, arms outstretched, legs crossed at the ankles, and His head bowed to His chest.

Now, upon closer examination, we can see that He is hanging on something, yes, a wooden cross.

And there's drops of blood running down His arms, His side, and gathering in puddles at the foot of the cross.

Its not a pleasant sight at all. Its not at all like the cross which hangs above and behind our altar.

But, there He hangs. Do you see Him? How about now, can you put it all together now, do you now understand the message for today?

Jesus said: ***"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*** That:

This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." And: ***"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,***

you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Now these are the same Words the people in our text had difficulty with. Just as many do today.

To them, and to many people today, after hearing this passage, have an image in our minds of crude cannibalism.

Which by the way, was, a charge leveled against many Christians in the world during the earlier missionary times.

Now, you've seen it, and you've heard it. That is, the message of the "Living Bread", the bread that gives us eternal life.

A bread which is much more than a ordinary loaf of bread which can only give us temporary life.

My friends, Jesus isn't talking about ordinary bread, nor is He talking about the bread we receive at the communion rail every Sunday morning.

No! The fact is, this part of John's Gospel has nothing to do with Holy Communion as many believe it does.

And to eat of the "Living Bread" means that were nourished in a much different way. Were nourished with the essentials for Life eternal.

And Jesus was trying to make this clear by using the imagery of bread, as food for the soul.

Jesus said; ***"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "***

Its the Living Bread, the very presence of Christ within us, that encourages, you and I to forgive, to offer hope, and to restore life.

This hunger which will give us eternal Life, is satisfied as we eat this Bread, and receive it for what it is, and who it is.

Jesus said: ***Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.***

“To remain in me” is to know that no matter what comes our way, we will not be deserted, nor left to face whatever happens on our own.

Christ comes to live within us, to take up residence in our hearts, and He promises never to leave us, nor forsake us.

Today, you and I are offered a different kind of service, and a different kind of bread, the “Bread of Life,” the one, and only food for a hungry soul.

Its the loaf of bread, the Rockwell shared meal, and a crucified Jesus, that make up the picture of eternal life with Jesus Christ in heaven.

A picture that says; if you believe in Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life that came down from heaven, a life saving bread, you will live for eternity.

Now, do you get it? Now, can you see it?

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.