**Text**: John 6:56-59

 **The Bethel Pulpit**

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

We have finished Ephesians today. This greeting reminds us of all the wisdom therein, giving us guidelines for building up the body of Christ. Thank you for reading Ephesians with me. I trust we are never DONE with Ephesians’ wisdom.

John 6 is our main focus today: Jesus’ words promising: “I am the BREAD of LIFE.”

BREAD ! The staff of life. Our bulletin cover reminds us that we don’t live by bread alone, and also, that none of us live long WITHOUT bread…bread being the synonym for food. Because we DON’T live long without food and shelter, today we are inviting your participation in helping

those who have had the flood waters rising in their basements and homes and businesses. WE can help get BREAD to these people. We invite your generosity! Check Bethel’s website for addresses where you can send checks.

In that same spirit, we pay attention to people around the world who do not have clothing and daily life necessities, through the work of Lutheran World Relief. Check out the display in the Emmaus Room, to discover how you can provide this kind of BREAD for those in need.

Now I want to talk about bread…as it is pictured on your bulletin cover.

 “I am the bread of life…whoever eats of this bread will live forever.”

So I have one question for us today: Who gets the bread?

As you read through chapter 6 of John, you notice the ‘whoever”, “anyone” and “everyone” phrases that occur again and again: whoever comes to me….whoever believes in me….anyone who eats this bread…everyone who believes in me….and then the promise: will have eternal life.

Thank goodness you and I are included in the ‘whoever’, the ‘anyone’, the ‘everybody’ to whom Jesus makes these promises. The bread is for us, whoever we are.

Episcopalians, Catholics and Lutherans around the world and through the centuries have long been faithful in the way they treat this sacred body and blood of Christ. All three denominations believe that, by God’s power of God’s Word, the ordinary bread becomes the body/flesh of Christ and the ordinary wine/juice become the blood of Christ. How does that happen? Martin Luther acknowledged that we humans have no way to know what God is doing, so Luther uses words like “…in, with and under “ to describe God’s mysterious ways for us.

In the accounts of the last supper that Jesus had with his disciples, Jesus said: “This is my body…this is my blood…broken and shed for…..? for who? for YOU ! Then God leaves it up to us to describe and define and decide who the YOU is. The Bible does not say what AGE we should be to receive it, the Bible does not say how much we should KNOW before we receive it, the Bible does not say if we should be single, or married or divorced. God says: You figure out how to guard the sacred body and blood of Christ, and how to invite people to eat and drink together. YOU FIGURE IT OUT, because eternal life with God is the promise given to all who eat and drink.

Some say children need to UNDERSTAND first. Some say you can’t have communion if you are divorced.

One pastor I knew, years ago, refused to give communion to anyone who had been out drinking on Saturday night. What does Luther say? Luther says: “whoever BELIEVES the words ‘for YOU’ is fully prepared and fully worthy to receive the body and blood of Christ.

Here at Bethel, communion traditions have changed through the years. Communion was often connected to affirmation of baptism (confirmation day): that was the first time to eat at the Lord’s table. Then, 5th grade became the accepted age, with careful times of instruction prior to that first time. Now, we say 3rd grade is the accepted age.

We have children whose parents are teaching them faithfully about Jesus and this incredible gift that God gives us in this sacrament. Some parents are wondering whether or not their children can be given the bread and wine before 3rd grade. At our monthly Bethel Jam, where all ages of Sunday School children worship with their parents, ALL children are welcome at the table.

Some say that children are too young to understand what eating Christ’s body and drinking Christ’s blood is all about and they should wait until they understand. I’m not sure that we, as adults, are much better at comprehending all that God gives us in the bread and wine than children are.

One thing I know: children DO understand when they are excluded from receiving a piece of bread when they come forward with their parents/grandparents.

Once, years ago, in a congregation far from here, a friend of mine brought her 3 year old grandson to worship. They both received the sacrament. This was the first time the boy had ever been to worship.

When they got home, the boy’s mom asked: “What did you do at worship tonight?” The little boy thought for a few minutes….then he said: “We ate Jesus.”

I think that little boy totally understood that Jesus now lived inside of him. I truly believe this eating and drinking, for him, gave him a sense of the eternal life that Jesus promises:

**Anyone who eats of this bread, lives forever.**

**Amen.**