

17 August 2003  
Pentecost 10

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

### “Eating With God”

Text: Exodus 24:3-11; John 6:1-15; Ephesians 4:1-8

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

The last verse that we heard from the Old Testament reading is a remarkable verse – one that is, unfortunately, easily overlooked. It speaks of God with His people as they eat and drink in His presence. He is not just a God who is incredibly large and far away, but also a God who is near His people and intimate with them. . . . And that’s remarkable because you could hardly blame God if He didn’t do this; if He were to simply give up on them. Because His people had given Him nothing but heartache and pain and rebellion from the very beginning. Or even if we don’t go back to the very beginning, but simply consider what God put up with in the few chapters before our reading from Exodus, it would be enough to vindicate God for giving up on His people. For He had just rescued His people from their slavery in Egypt. He divided the Red Sea for them to cross on dry ground, and had closed it back up on the Egyptian Army. He had provided them with Manna, heavenly bread, enough for all of them to eat everyday and have their fill. When they grew tired of Manna, He provided them with meat, quail to eat. And He provided water to drink from a rock. And if all of that were not enough, He would have done even more, so great is His goodness and love for His people. . . . And yet what did He receive in return? At almost every turn, grumbling, and complaining, and rebellion. You couldn’t blame God if He were to give up on these stiff-necked people.

And yet, there He is! In our reading today, making a covenant with His people. There with them, in spite of all their dissatisfaction and rebellion. There He is with them as they eat and drink, in the bond of a fellowship meal. . . . And what makes that even more remarkable is that in our reading, the stage is set for the people to let God down again! For in establishing this covenant, the people twice respond with one voice, **“Everything the Lord has said we will do. . . . We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.”** And you know what? *No they won’t!* And God knows they won’t – He’s not that naïve! And it won’t take them long not to! In fact, in just a few weeks, they’re going to be bowing down to a golden calf! . . . You couldn’t blame God if He were to give up on these stiff-necked people!

And yet, there He is! ***“But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.”*** God with His people in love and forgiveness.

Now fast-forward to the Gospel reading from St. John, and you know what? You see this same thing! Many years have gone by, but there is God with His people as they eat and drink with Him. He is not just a God who is incredibly large and far away, but also a God who is near His people and intimate with them, now living with them in the person of Jesus Christ. . . . And that’s remarkable again, because you could hardly blame God if He didn’t do this; if He were to simply give up on them. Because His people just didn’t get it. He had come in the flesh to be with His people, to speak to them the very Word of God, and to redeem them, and yet what did He receive in return? He is rejected by His own people. He’s just not the kind of Saviour or Redeemer they’re in the market for right now. . . . You couldn’t blame God if He were to give up on these stiff-necked people.

And yet, there He is! In our Gospel reading, sitting down to eat and drink with over 5,000 people, in the bond of a fellowship meal. . . . And what makes that even more remarkable is that in our reading, we see that the people still don’t get it. The people had followed Him not because of His teaching, but because ***“they saw the miraculous signs He had performed on the sick.”*** After the miracle, and after they had all received their fill, they want to make Jesus their earthly king – *by force, if necessary*. Even Jesus’ disciples aren’t really seeing and understanding what is going on, as they stumble and hesitate when Jesus asks them, ***“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”*** . . . You couldn’t blame God if He were to give up on these slow, stiff-necked people.

And yet, there He is! Even though the people didn’t realize it, ***“they saw God, and they ate and drank.”*** God is with His people in love and forgiveness.

Now let’s fast-forward in time yet again, to St. Paul’s words in our Epistle reading from the book of Ephesians. And what Paul writes there will help us fast-forward in time to our own day and age. For Paul writes, ***“There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*** Or in other words, what Paul is saying here – through His repetition of the word “one” – is that the same God that ate and drank with His people at Mt. Sinai, is the same God who ate and drank with his people on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and is the same God who is here with us, as we eat and drink today. Across all the centuries and cultures, across Old and New Testaments, across all times and places, across all boundaries, He is the same. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

And so at this altar, ***“you see God, and you eat and drink.”*** He is not just a God who is

incredibly large and far away, but also a God who is near and intimate with you, His people. God is here, with His people, in love and forgiveness.

And that's remarkable, because again, you could hardly blame God if He didn't do this; if He didn't come here to feed us with the body and blood of His Son Jesus Christ in the bond of this fellowship meal; if He were to simply give up on us. Because aren't we just like the others? Aren't we just like God's people there at Mt. Sinai? Don't we too bow down to our own gods? Don't we grumble and complain when He does not do what we think He should be doing? Or not doing it fast enough, or in the way we had in mind? Don't we too grow tired of His gifts and wish for something more exciting and spectacular? Didn't we too stand before this altar on the day of our Confirmation and say, "***We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.***" Do we really think we can fulfill that promise? Is God that naïve? . . . You couldn't blame God if He were to give up on us slow, stiff-necked people.

And don't we also act like the people on the shores of the Sea of Galilee? Following Jesus not because of His teaching, but perhaps hoping for a miracle? Desiring an earthly kingdom and worldly success, rather than the kingdom that He has come to bring? Do we sometimes turn away from Jesus because He's just not the kind of Saviour or Redeemer we're in the market for right now? Aren't we often like His disciples, not getting it and stumbling and hesitating when we are faced with tests and difficulties? . . . You couldn't blame God if He were to give up on us slow, stiff-necked people!

And yet, here He is! With us! Sunday after Sunday, not rejecting us, not holding our sins and weaknesses and rebellion against us. But coming to be with us, for us to eat and drink with Him. To eat and drink in His presence, to eat and drink the very body and blood of our Lord, His Son Jesus Christ, the same body and blood that hung on the cross for your sins and rebellion, to receive your punishment in your place. To give us, personally, His love and forgiveness. The one, same, God and Father of us all is here with us too. And "***we see God, and eat and drink!***"

And that's remarkable! That even though we constantly fail Him, our God and Saviour remains faithful to us. That even though we show ourselves to be no different than God's people at Mt. Sinai or in Galilee, sinners through and through, that God still wants us as His own. That even though we are most unworthy, God has come to be with us, to eat and drink with us, and to remove the guilt of our sin and make us worthy; make us His children, and heirs of eternal life. . . . And even though we may sometimes feel that God should give up on us, its good to know that He doesn't feel that way! In His love and forgiveness for you He will never give up on, and never stop providing here for you. So that you know that He is here, always here, for you. Not to raise his hand against you,

but to feed you, and eat and drink with you!

But now we need to fast-forward in time once more, to our future. And actually, its not just our future, but what we are beginning to experience even now. For as you will hear again in just a little bit, this banquet table of the Lord doesn't include only us here, but also "*the angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven!*" For even though we are in no way worthy, here we receive a seat around our Saviour's *Heavenly* banquet table, which we will continue to enjoy into eternity. Here and now we are receiving a *foretaste* of the feast to come; but there, forever, we will see God – not hidden – but in all of His glory, and eat and drink. All of us! Those God ate and drank with in the Old Testament, and by the shores of Galilee, and those who have knelt, and continue to kneel, or stand, at this altar. Here we are all one, around our one God, by virtue of our one baptism, around one table, in the one feast that we will enjoy, forgiven and glorified, forever!

And if you think 5,000 was a lot to feed, wait till you finally see the crowd around this table!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.