

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

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Drawn to God

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Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ; grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The discourse in John 6, following the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, stands as a pivotal moment in the Gospel narrative, illustrating a profound theological truth about the nature of Christ and the essence of spiritual nourishment. This passage is crucial in understanding how Jesus redefines sustenance and how believers are drawn into a transformative relationship with God.

Jesus' declaration, "I am the bread of life," is central to this discourse. Far from being a mere metaphor, this statement is a profound assertion of divine identity and mission. In the ancient Near Eastern world, bread was not just a staple food; it symbolized the very essence of life and survival. By identifying as the bread of life, Jesus claims to be the ultimate source of spiritual sustenance and eternal life. He invites the crowds to move beyond their immediate physical needs and to seek a deeper, eternal nourishment. This invitation is not merely about meeting a temporary need but about providing a solution to humanity's most profound spiritual hunger.

The response of the crowd to this invitation reveals much about human nature and our approach to spiritual matters. Many follow Jesus not out of a genuine desire to understand and embrace the words of eternal life but because of the miracles he performs and the promise of material benefit. Their focus remains on their immediate physical needs rather than the deeper, spiritual reality Jesus is trying to address. Despite their superficial motives, Jesus remains steadfast: asserting that his flesh is true food and his blood is true drink, emphasizing that true life comes from partaking in him, not just in a physical sense but spiritually and relationally.

In this context, the concept of being "drawn to God" takes on significant theological depth. This drawing is not a passive, indifferent act but an active, divine initiative. Jesus explains that it is the Father who draws people to the Son, signifying that our coming to Christ is a result of divine grace and initiative rather than merely human effort. This drawing is a powerful, irresistible force of grace, indicating that God takes the first step in initiating a relationship with us. It is a reminder that our faith is

not a product of our own striving but a response to God's calling and work in our lives.

However, this divine drawing is not coercive. It is an invitation to respond to God's love and grace, a gentle yet compelling call that resonates with our deepest longings. This drawing manifests as a deep-seated yearning for something transcendent and eternal—an acknowledgment of our spiritual emptiness and a desire to be filled by the living water that Jesus offers. It speaks to the human experience of searching for meaning and fulfillment that goes beyond the material.

To be drawn to God is to enter into a covenant relationship characterized by intimacy and mutual indwelling. Jesus' talk of eating his flesh and drinking his blood speaks to a profound union with him. This mystical communion represents a transformative relationship where believers' lives become intertwined with the life of Christ. It involves a dynamic interplay of intimacy, dependence, and a deep, abiding connection that shapes and sustains our spiritual existence.

Jesus' warning that those who do not partake of his flesh and blood will not have eternal life is a sobering reality check. It is not a condemnation but a clarion call to recognize the seriousness of the offer of eternal life. It necessitates surrendering our will to Christ, trusting in God's provision, and walking in the Way. This active participation is crucial to experiencing the fullness of the eternal life Jesus promises.

The chapter will conclude with a profound statement: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Jesus emphasizes the spiritual nature of His offer, highlighting that the true essence of life is not found in physical sustenance but in the spiritual transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables believers to receive and internalize the bread of life, leading to a deep, spiritual transformation and a fuller experience of God's presence.

This passage presents a compelling and transformative invitation to be drawn to God. It challenges us to recognize Jesus as the bread of life and to enter into a profound, life-giving relationship. This drawing is a manifestation of God's grace, but it also invites a deliberate and intentional response from us. As we yield to the Spirit's leading, we are invited into a life-transforming communion with God, where we find true sustenance and eternal life.

As Brother Rohr teaches, "The divine is always seeking us, and the best we can do is to let ourselves be found." Will you let yourself be drawn to God? Drawn into communion with the divine? Drawn into communion with the material? Just

generally drawn into communion with creation? How does that sound to you?
Freeing? Terrifying?

From the very beginning, the story of Scripture unfolds with God pursuing humanity in a way that demonstrates profound love and commitment. In the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve's disobedience, God seeks them out, not to condemn but to restore. This pursuit is not about mere observation but about reestablishing a broken relationship. God's seeking is an expression of grace and a testament to God's relentless desire to reconnect with creation, emphasizing that divine pursuit is motivated by love rather than judgment.

In the sacred dance of divine pursuit, the narrative of John 6 unveils a breathtaking truth: God's relentless search for humanity is not just a historical event but an ongoing, intimate invitation to every soul. Jesus, declaring himself as the bread of life, opens the door to a profound relationship that transcends mere physical existence and reaches into the very depths of our spiritual hunger. This divine pursuit is marked not by coercion but by an unwavering, tender love that beckons us to recognize our own emptiness and turn towards the eternal sustenance he offers. In this light, Jesus' words challenge us to confront our deepest longings and to embrace a relationship that promises true transformation and fulfillment.

The divine initiative that echoes through the pages of Scripture, from the Garden of Eden to the life of Christ, is a testament to God's unyielding love and grace. Just as God sought out Adam and Eve to restore their broken relationship, so too does Jesus seek out the lost, the marginalized, and the broken-hearted. This relentless pursuit is not a distant or detached gesture but a passionate and personal endeavor to reconcile us with the divine. As we stand at the crossroads of this invitation, we are faced with a profound choice: to let ourselves be found by the divine grace that seeks us, to surrender our own striving, and to enter into a life-transforming communion with God. In doing so, we discover a relationship that is as deeply fulfilling as it is eternally significant, a testament to the profound love that continuously seeks and draws us into the heart of the divine. Amen.