



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
www.mzluth.org

August 23, 2009
12th Sunday after Pentecost
Hebrews 5:11-6:3
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 1 Kings 19:3-8
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 34
Second Lesson: Hebrews 5:11-6:3
Gospel: John 6:41-51

Graduate to Solid Food
Make Constant Use of the Gospel
Grow up to Maturity

Have you seen commercials for Gerber® Graduates®? I've always thought it's kind of a great marketing gimmick. It combines two things that we seem to be obsessed with – food and graduations. We all love food and we sure seem to love graduations because we sure celebrate them often enough. Think of how many of your children's or your grandchildren's or great-grandchildren's graduations you are going to sit through in your life, whether it's preschool, kindergarten, grade school, high school, college. Think of how many times you are going to hear "Pomp and Circumstance" play. So you combine food with the idea that you have to graduate to this solid food and you've really made a big step up. I'm just waiting for Hallmark® to come out with some cards that you can send to a parent whose child has just graduated to Gerber® Graduates® since they've really moved up in the world now.

These are two things that we are really interested in, and I guess you could say those marketers must have been onto something, because it's two things our God combines together for us this morning as well in what we just read. It combines the idea of food, spiritual food, spiritual food for our faith, graduating to stronger spiritual food, more advanced spiritual food. So our God takes the same concept and puts it together a long, long time before the advertisers came up with Gerber® Graduates®. The idea that as Christians we should be graduating to solid spiritual food and not just be satisfied with knowing the basics about our faith, that's what God is saying to us through the writing of the Hebrews this morning.

And he even says it more strongly. He says to make constant use of that Law and Gospel, the message that comes in his Word. He says to make constant use of it, not just some here and there, not just once a week or once every other week or once a month thing, but constant use is what he talks about. Then he reminds us also that as we do this, we will do what part of our goal is as a Christian, which is to glorify God. Part of the way we glorify God is that we grow up to maturity. But as we'll see this morning, that's not something that benefits God. That's something that most definitely benefits us.

The writer of the Hebrews said "we've got much more to say about this," but he can't because it's way above their head really to begin with. They should have moved on to spiritual maturity and been teaching others some of these truths that he can't even

explore with them yet, but they just stayed kind of apathetic towards the message about God. They knew the basics. They knew that Jesus had lived and died in their place. They knew that their sin was taken away. They knew that they needed to repent, repentance from acts that lead to death, but they hadn't moved on to get to know God better. So in essence, in this section he is kind of chewing them out for it. I don't know any other way to explain it. That sure sounds like what he was doing.

They had been talking to them about how Jesus is superior to angels. He talked to them about how Jesus is superior to Moses and the Sinaitic covenant. He explained to them how Jesus was superior to the high priest, to the priesthood. In fact, he said even more than that. "He is a priest in the order of Melchizedek;" one of the verses right before what I just read to you. He said, "I could talk to you more about that, but you haven't gotten some of the basics down all that well yet. You just keep spinning your wheels instead of moving on to the more solid food." He says, "That's wrong."

God is telling us it's wrong to just be satisfied with knowing the basics. "That's enough" sometimes we are tempted to think. "I know God loves me. I know I'm forgiven. I don't need to know him much more." God says it's wrong. Think about some of the implications of this.

I once did this with an old ratty Bible I had. I asked the people a question during a sermon; "How many of you know what's in Nahum? Tell me what the Book of Nahum is about." Of course because I asked a question during a sermon, no one was going to say "boo" anyhow, but I honestly believed no one knew what Nahum was about. So I took the pages of Nahum and ripped it out of the Bible and let it flutter to the ground in front of the public and said, "If you don't know what Nahum is about in your Bible, that part of the Bible isn't in your Bible."

So think about it. Go through your list. How big is your personal Bible? Someone comes up to you and says, "What's in Malachi?" What are you going to say? Someone comes up to you and says, "What's James about?" What are you going to say? How big is your personal Bible? Is it limited to only the readings that we have weekly from worship? Then your Bible is kind of small, isn't it? I think that would go some degree to show us that we haven't probably through constant use trained ourselves to distinguish good and evil from knowing God's Word all that well. Each one of us sitting here probably has a different size personal Bible, and I'm not talking about the size of print, right? We have more or less of God's Word that we know, and I wonder how often the size of that Bible of what we know doesn't fluctuate. We tend to forget some things that we once knew, don't we? We tend to not always retain all the things that maybe we once knew.

It kind of goes also to the same reminder of where we have fallen short in what our God has called us to do here, where we have sinned against our God. How often at confirmation time don't you say to someone, "You probably know more than the rest of the congregation knows." Confirmation is an instruction in the elementary teachings of God's Word. God's encouragement is to move on to solid food so that we can all be

teachers so that we can share these with other people. To some degree or other, you and I have all failed God in this regard. We don't know as much as we could.

I spend time studying God's Word and yet I often think to myself there's so much that I should be spending more time and I should know it better than what I do. I can find all kinds of time for innate things. If I'm sitting with a cup of coffee in the morning and the television is on, sports I know can cycle through about three times if I'm reading or something else and I'll look up every time at the same story. Do I really need to hear it again? No. Do I really need to know a lot of that stuff? No. Do I need all that time that I spend looking at some of the stuff I watch on TV? No. Yet I make time for it and do it. Yet I don't make the time to do something that's infinitely better for me, which is to dig into God's Word or to dig into it with my fellow Christians; in doing that, I sin.

Think about how much time we spend for things we don't even want to hear about and yet we still are bombarded by it when we have the radio or the TV on. Tell me, this last week, if you would have heard the name "Brett Favre" one more time, wouldn't you just want to throw up? You heard it every time you turned around. Yet you still made more time to hear more about it. You got to watch some guy standing in the dark telling you he's outside of the training facility in Eden Prairie. Like who knew? It was dark. Yet those reports are there again and again. And some of us watched them again and again.

We make time for things we don't even like. And I'm assuming because we are all sitting here this morning, we not only like our God, we love him because we know he lived in our place and died in our place and took away all these sins that you and I keep committing day after day. We absolutely love him and are crazy about him and yet it's still hard for us to make that kind of time, isn't it?

It just goes to highlight how gracious our God is. He forgives us. He still loves us. He is patient with us even when we don't have the time for him. And that's amazing, absolutely and positively amazing. When you come to the Lord's altar today if you come to communion, and he gives you his body and blood, it is the very body and blood that took away the sin of your indifference to his Word. It is the very body and blood that took away the sin of you thinking that you know it all when you don't. That's how patient and loving our God is.

He tells us to make constant use of it. He knows we won't. Yet he still, before the creation of the world knew that we would sin. He still said, "I am going to come and live and die in their place and I am going to take away every last one of their sins." That's the depth of God's love for us. That's what we get to know more and more when we grow into maturity. As we move on past the elementary teachings and through constant use, we grow into maturity. We graduate to the solid food of more in depth, mature knowledge of God's Word.

That's something that we need. That's something that blesses us. That's something that gives us the strength to face living in the world that we live in. We live in a sinful

world. We have all kinds of things that happen day after day, week after week, month after month that Satan wants to use to lead us to question God's purpose, God's plans, God's love, God's involvement in the world. Satan is going to throw all those accusations up and hope some of them stick to our minds.

But the more that we have grown in God's Word, the more we can look back to what we knew at this time last year and say, "Now at this time this year, I know God better. And at this time next year, I want to know him even better." The better we will be able to face all the difficult things that happen in this world. The heartache and the hardships, the worries and the anxieties, we'll be able to face them better because we'll have God at our side. We need that.

Look at our First Lesson. Here was one of the great prophets, Elijah. And even he, when he took his eyes off of God and focused on what was going on; he focused on God's great miracle when God had the great "sacrifice-off," the bull roast on Mt. Carmel, and he thought everyone was going to come to God. They didn't. Because he was so focused on what his expectations were and not on what God had said in his promises, he ran off and said, "I just want to die. I'm no better than my ancestors." Here's a guy that, even though he was probably the most spiritual mature person in Israel at that time, could have really benefitted from being even more spiritually mature. And he did grow, because when he did get to Mt. Horeb, God repeated his promises to him and those promises strengthened him in his faith and then he continued on, but he continued on when God led him to a greater maturity.

So for you and I, when we spend time with his Word and with his Sacraments, when we spend time reflecting on our Baptism and rejoicing in his body and blood and the Sacrament, it's not something we are doing for God. God is doing something for us. He is strengthening us so that we become mature and can face the things that are on this side of heaven. That's the greatest blessing in the world. That's a blessing that doesn't have any negative side effects.

You might make the case that another one of God's great blessings for mankind is ice cream. It's enjoyable. It's cool on a hot day, and it tastes good. But the more I seem to eat it, the more it seems to clog my arteries. It's got some bad side effects, right? God's Word doesn't do that. The more you are in God's Word and eat that spiritual food, it's nothing but blessing. It's nothing but benefit. It's nothing but growth that is an incredible blessing in your life.

So graduate and dig into God's solid food.